



# **RADICALLY REIMAGINED RELATIONSHIPS: SELECTED RESEARCH**

## INTRODUCTION

In this annotated bibliography, we provide an overview of the research behind our five indicators of Radically Reimagined Relationships: Commitment to Equity and Justice; Culture of Belonging and Well-Being; Dispositions of Humility, Care, and Curiosity; Shared Purpose and Responsibility; and Agency and Trust. This collection of articles includes research from peer-reviewed journals, masters and doctoral theses, books, and reports issued by nonprofit organizations.

In this overview, we have included articles describing relationships among a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, school administrators, students, families, and communities. In deciding which articles to include, we have striven for a balance across the types of stakeholder relationships represented. While our future reports and literature reviews might dive more deeply into one type of relationship—for example, relationships between teachers and parents—this piece provides a broader overview and a first step into the rich world of research on relationships within school communities.

In this Preface, we also want to call out our Commitment to Equity and Justice indicator. Equity in education is both an urgent and a far-reaching priority that is getting some much-needed attention in policy and research circles right now. The glaring lack of, and critical need for, racial and socioeconomic equity permeates every aspect of education policy, research, and practice, including those relating to our other four indicators of Radically Reimagined Relationships. We acknowledge that we cannot possibly tackle all of the nuances inherent in the vast topic of equity in one short literature review, and we know that our review likely leaves out some important findings and perspectives. Still, we hope we have provided an informative first glimpse into some of the research available on equity as it relates to reimagining relationships within schools.

Finally, we have been pleased to find that there is a wealth of research relating to all of our indicators of Radically Reimagined Relationships, much more than we could hope to source or summarize. Additionally, each one of these topics contains its own nuances, subtopics, and issues. Our intention is not to offer an exhaustive collection of references, but to provide some of the research base for our indicators of Radically Reimagined Relationships. We are always excited to learn more: please do share with us any additional research that we may have missed.

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## ON COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND JUSTICE

This white paper from Center for Inspired Teaching reviews the research on equity and engagement-based education. The review of the research first confirms that white, wealthy students are far more likely to have access to engaging educational experiences than low- and middle-income students and students of color. It then suggests that engaging educational experiences might actually be most beneficial for those same students who are least likely to experience them. The paper provides the following recommendations to combat this inequity: 1) build strong relationships through an asset-based approach to working with students; 2) honor and center students' funds of knowledge and ways of knowing; and 3) engage students with learning experiences that are meaningful to them, that are relevant to their lives, and that bring them joy. The paper also provides resources that readers can use to begin putting these recommendations into action.

Wacker, A. (2019). *Closing the Engagement Gap: A Social Justice Imperative*. (Center for Inspired Teaching white paper). Retrieved from <https://inspiredteaching.org/wp-content/uploads/Closing-the-Engagement-Gap.-A-Social-Justice-Imperative.pdf>.

This article discusses the concept of student engagement and asserts that one reason for student disengagement is the disconnect between students' lives and what they are learning in school. Because they are less likely to see their lives reflected in mainstream curricula, students from marginalized groups are most likely to experience this kind of disengagement. Thus, even if teachers are using nominally "engaging" strategies (for example, project-based work, pair work, and discussion) students will still not be engaged if content is not connected to and made relevant to their lives. It is therefore critical that schools commit not only to "engaging" curriculum and pedagogy, but also to culturally sustaining, equitable, and just curriculum pedagogy.

McMahon, B. J. (2003). Putting the elephant into the refrigerator: Student engagement, critical pedagogy and antiracist education. *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 38(002).

While also relevant to our Culture of Belonging and Well-Being indicator, this article has been placed in this section due to its explicit focus on equity as

it affects students' sense of belonging. In this article, Gray, Hope, and Matthews discuss how efforts to promote a sense of community and belonging in students cannot ignore questions of race; in fact, initiatives to promote belonging can become alienating when implemented in a race-ignorant way. Too often, efforts to help Black youth feel a sense of belonging in school are focused on changing these youth to fit conventional definitions of school, rather than changing the school environment to allow these youth to feel a sense of belonging. The article provides strategies for ensuring that efforts to promote students' sense of belonging are equitable and culturally sustaining.

Gray, D. L., Hope, E. C., & Matthews, J. S. (2018). Black and belonging at school: A case for interpersonal, instructional, and institutional opportunity structures. *Educational Psychologist, 53*(2), 97-113.

This article focuses on how different schoolwide diversity policies affect both the sense of belonging and the academic performance of marginalized students. After analyzing the diversity policies of 66 different Belgian schools, the researchers were able to sort them into three categories: multiculturalism (valuing cultural diversity), colorblindness (ignoring cultural diversity), and assimilationism (actively working to erase cultural diversity). One year later, the researchers surveyed students at these schools and found that multiculturalism-focused school policies resulted in smaller belonging and achievement gaps between majority-group and minority-group students. On the other hand, colorblind and assimilationist policies resulted in belonging and achievement gaps growing wider over time. This article might be particularly useful for schools interested in creating diversity and equity policies, as well as for those actively working to change colorblind or assimilationist environments.

Celeste, L., Baysu, G., Phalet, K., Meeussen, L., & Kende, J. (2019). Can school diversity policies reduce belonging and achievement gaps between minority and majority youth? Multiculturalism, colorblindness, and assimilationism assessed. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

While much of the literature relating to equity and social justice addresses racial and socioeconomic equity, McIlroy's doctoral dissertation focuses on issues of ability and disability. In an initial review of the literature, the author notes that children with disabilities in New Zealand used to be isolated from their peers in mainstream schools, but that the education model has moved toward full inclusion classrooms in recent years. However, she found that because special needs children were often exempted from school assessment processes, their learning and growth went unrecorded. This had numerous negative effects, including limiting such students' potential and incentivizing teachers to direct their attention away from students with special needs

towards students whose learning would be measured. McIlroy's qualitative research study focuses on a New Zealand school that uses "narrative assessment" (a form of assessment that includes narratives from a student's teachers, therapists, aides, and parents to measure their growth over time) to assess students with disabilities. McIlroy found that the use of narrative assessment challenged the notion that these students lacked potential for growth and learning and facilitated true inclusion of these students into the learning community.

McIlroy, A. M. (2017). "The myth of inability": exploring children's capability and belonging at primary school through narrative assessment. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

As Gregory, Clawson, and Davis discovered, implementation of restorative practices in schools can be a powerful tool for improving student-teacher relationships. Through surveying 412 students across 29 high school classrooms, the authors found that teachers who are highly committed to restorative practices had more positive relationships with their culturally diverse students (as reported by students) than their counterparts who implemented fewer restorative practices. Additionally, teachers committed to restorative practices had fewer disciplinary referrals overall and issued proportionally fewer disciplinary referrals to students of color than other teachers. Schools wishing to radically reimagine relationships in their schools might consider using restorative practices as a tool to do so.

Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2016). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26(4), 325-353.

This study focuses on ten principals taking part in a Leadership Task Force in an urban school district on the west coast of the United States. The researchers filmed these principals engaged in a variety of different activities (including facilitating parent meetings, engaging in post-observation discussions with teachers, leading professional development, taking part in recess duty, etc.). These videos were analyzed and coded using qualitative research methods. The researchers concluded that principals who were both explicit about their commitment to equity and clear about how they would address equity issues were much more likely to actually disrupt inequities within their own schools. This article provides a number of helpful examples of principals enacting equity leadership practices and could be very useful for other school leaders hoping to deepen the equity focus in their own practice.

Rigby, J. G., & Tredway, L. (2015). Actions matter: How school leaders enact equity principles. *Handbook of urban educational leadership*, 329-348.

Through their review of the research literature on school improvement, Santamaría and Santamaría conclude that efforts to improve schools through standardized tests, harsh accountability measures, and conformity have been largely unsuccessful. The authors then review additional research that points to culturally sustaining leadership as a more innovative, more successful way to improve outcomes for students from underserved backgrounds. The authors describe a continuum of school leader efficacy, from status quo (unwilling to acknowledge the history behind current inequities), to culturally responsive (willing to recognize biases and inequities), to culturally sustaining (willing to give up unearned privileges to work alongside marginalized communities). The article provides several examples of culturally sustaining leadership and is therefore recommended for those striving to move their school leadership away from the status quo and towards a culturally sustaining model.

Santamaría, L., & Santamaría, A. (2016). Toward Culturally Sustaining Leadership: Innovation beyond 'School Improvement' Promoting Equity in Diverse Contexts. *Education Sciences*, 6(4), 33.

This blog series on equity in early childhood education explores the importance of community and family partnerships in early learning. Drawing on an array of published research and think tank reports, the author describes the positive shift from “parent involvement” (which suggests an imbalanced, hierarchical relationship) to “family and community partnership” (which suggests a more equal, bidirectional relationship). The author also describes the challenges and pitfalls that arise when schools attempt family partnerships in diverse communities without first building a strong foundation of cultural and community awareness.

Cauldwell, J. (2019, December 3). Centering Equity: Authentic Family Engagement Is Bi-Directional: Engaging in Meaningful Family Partnerships [Blog series]. Retrieved from <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/centering-equity-authentic-family-engagement-bi-directional-engaging-meaningful-family-partnerships/>.

Jahromi's article focuses on best practices for making immigrant parents feel welcome and included in their children's school communities. For this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with four elementary school teachers and four parents of elementary school-aged children. Interviews with the teachers demonstrated a commitment to creating a welcoming environment, open communication, and building relationships with families. Interviews with parents suggested that they particularly valued when others in the school community made efforts to include them. They also appreciated when teachers prioritized open communication. The author (a student of school psychology) includes specific recommendations for school

psychologists and counselors who wish to shift school culture to better promote immigrant families' sense of belonging in their schools.

Jahromi, S.D.R.F (2017). *Sense of belonging and immigrant parents: strengthening the family-school partnership* (Unpublished Masters Thesis). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

## ON CULTURE OF BELONGING AND WELL-BEING

This short introduction to a belonging-focused issue of the journal *Educational and Child Psychology* provides a brief but comprehensive overview of all the reasons that school belonging is so important. Among these reasons are the following: a sense of belonging improves students' motivation and engagement in academics; it correlates positively with improved mental health, sleep, and resilience; and it decreases the likelihood of bullying, depression, and dropping out. The authors also name some of the interventions that have been most successful in promoting belonging. These include teacher support and a focus on social-emotional competencies. The authors also note that despite the importance of school belonging, loneliness and alienation are growing problems in school systems around the world. This suggests a need for renewed focus on school belonging. The authors finish by outlining the studies published in this issue of *Educational and Child Psychology*. We encourage readers interested in school belonging to look into these articles as well.

Roffey, S., Boyle, C., & Allen, K. A. (2019). School belonging—Why are our students longing to belong to school? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 36(2), 6-8.

Allen et al summarize a number of research studies showing the benefits of school belonging for students. According to these studies, a strong sense of belonging has positive effects on grades and test scores, academic motivation, attitudes toward learning, and happiness. The authors note that such studies do not necessarily clarify the steps schools should take to foster belonging; this inspired them to conduct a meta-analysis of 51 studies on school belonging to identify recurring themes. Allen et al's meta-analysis found that student-teacher relationships were most strongly correlated with student belonging. Also significant were students' "personal characteristics" (for example, conscientiousness, self-esteem, and emotional stability). These findings suggest that in order to foster belonging, schools should encourage strong student- teacher relationships and pay particular attention to students' mental health and social- emotional development.

Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Ed-*

In her book highlighting the importance of belonging for students, Kathryn Riley first explores global trends that have an impact on students' sense of belonging in school (for example, the rise of populism and xenophobia in many countries). She then guides the reader through her own study of belonging in six UK schools. Notably, her research went beyond studying school belonging to actually practicing it: students, teachers, and administrators were all involved in the research process, from defining research questions to gathering and analyzing data. While the study yielded numerous findings, the overarching message of the book is the importance of ensuring that the entire culture and environment of schools respect and honor the realities of students' lives. Riley explicitly invites readers to use her findings to transform educational practice, stating: "Whether you are a leader, a practitioner, a student, a researcher or a policymaker...I hope the book will help you to contribute to the development of vibrant school communities: joyful and enquiring places in which young people can be and become their best possible selves" (pp. xiv-xv).

Riley, K. (2017). *Place, belonging and school leadership: Researching to make the difference*. London, England: Bloomsbury Publishing.

The BARR Center's Building Assets Reducing Risks model is one strategy that has been used to enhance student and teacher belonging and also improve student outcomes. This presentation summarizes a three-year randomized control study of the BARR model. As the presentation explains, the BARR model consists of the implementing specific strategies developed by the Center that emphasize whole child development and relationship-building with small cohorts of students (see more at [barrcenter.org/strategies/](http://barrcenter.org/strategies/)). American Institutes for Research's three-year study of this model examined its effects on 1,785 9th grade BARR students compared with 2,383 control students. The study also included 57 BARR teachers and 117 control teachers. Researchers found that BARR students scored higher in core academic courses than control students did; additionally, they reported better support and higher expectations from teachers, as well as higher engagement with school. BARR teachers reported more collaboration with their colleagues, better use of data, better support from administrators, and higher expectations for students than non-BARR teachers did.

Borman, T.H., Bos, H., O' Brien, B., Corsello, M., & Jerabek, A. (2018). BARR. Impacting 9th Grade Education Outcomes: Results from a Three-Year Randomized Control Trial. [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from <https://www.barrcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/AIR-SREE-2018-BARR.pdf>.

Waters' and White's article emphasizes the importance of well-being in



schools and provides a powerful case study of a school that transformed its culture to support student well-being. To enact this transformation, school leaders used an organizational change strategy known as “Appreciative Inquiry,” an approach that takes into account the ideas of all stakeholders at all levels of an organization (in this case, administrators, teachers, and students). Although administrators decided on the goal of improving well-being, it was teachers who devised the strategies and initiatives that would achieve this goal. Student input was collected at several points during the implementation and monitoring processes. The culture change appeared successful: student surveys showed an improved sense of well-being and disciplinary data showed decreased discipline referrals and increased “merits” awarded to students. We recommend looking to this article not only for ideas on improving well-being in schools, but also for ideas on transforming school culture overall.

Waters, L., & White, M. (2015). Case study of a school wellbeing initiative: Using appreciative inquiry to support positive change. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(1), 19-32.

While belonging and well-being are important for all students throughout their educational journeys, they are particularly important during transitional moments, for example when students transition from elementary to middle school. Lester and Cross’s study explored different aspects of school climate and their relative effects on student well-being during this transition, finding that peer support, feeling safe in school, feeling connected to school, and feeling connected to teachers were all important influencers of student well-being. This study highlights the importance of continuing to focus on school climate and student well-being even as students mature, become more independent, and take on increased academic responsibilities.

Lester, L., & Cross, D. (2015). The relationship between school climate and mental and emotional wellbeing over the transition from primary to secondary school. *Psychology of Well-being*, 5(1), 9.

Moolenaar and Slegers’ research across 46 Dutch elementary schools suggests that strong relationships between principals and their colleagues can strengthen leadership, school culture, and well-being among staff. This study delves into principals’ in-school relationships (with teachers, other staff, students, and parents) and intra-district relationships (with other principals and school district officials). Principals who took time to build strong relationships within their own schools were more likely to have strong intra-district relationships as well. Additionally, principals with strong in-school and intra-district relationships were found to be more likely to engage in Transformative Leadership (TL). TL is a concept that highlights 1) a leader’s ability to involve others in developing a shared vision and goals, 2) the leader’s

ability to consider and attend to the feelings and needs of supervisees, and 3) the extent to which the leader fosters supervisees' intellectual and professional goals. Previous research has linked Transformational Leadership to higher teacher satisfaction, stronger teacher engagement in school decision-making, and stronger student performance and engagement.

Moolenaar, N. M., & Slegers, P. J. (2015). The networked principal: Examining principals' social relationships and transformational leadership in school and district networks. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(1), 8-39.

In their research report from Search Institute, Pekel, Roehlkepartain, Syvertsen, and Scales assert that schools have been approaching family engagement from a misguided perspective, which does nothing for student well-being: "Put bluntly, too many family engagement efforts focus on getting families to help the institution achieve its priorities (or to comply with regulations), rather than on supporting families in working toward shared goals and aspirations for their children" (p. 8). According to the authors, schools and districts would be far more successful in improving outcomes for students if they focused instead on supporting positive developmental relationships between parents/guardians and children. The authors share results from their survey of a diverse sample of 1,085 US parents/guardians, which asked respondents about their relationships with their children and about their children's well-being and character. The results indicated significant correlations between the strength of parents/guardians' developmental relationships with their children and children's scores on various character strengths, including concern for others, motivation to work towards goals, and openness to challenges. Relationship strength was far more predictive of character strength than demographic measures (including race, socioeconomic status, and immigration status). Given the positive effects of developmental relationships, the authors urge schools to support families in cultivating these relationships with their children. Such a focus is likely to be far more beneficial for students in the long run than simply drafting parents for in-school volunteer activities; it is also a much more empowering, strengths-based way of engaging families.

Pekel, K., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Syvertsen, A. K., & Scales, P. C. (2015). Don't forget the families: The missing piece in America's effort to help all children succeed. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/SearchInstitute-DontForgetFamilies-Report-10-13-2015.pdf>.

## ON DISPOSITIONS OF HUMILITY, CARE, AND CURIOSITY

Humility, combined with the ability to forgive oneself and others, may be particularly valuable for teachers to cultivate. This study of 303 primary and secondary school teachers discovered positive and significant correlations between teachers' capacity for humility and forgiveness with self-efficacy (teacher's belief in their own ability to guide students to success). Humility, forgiveness, and teacher self-efficacy were each measured through previously validated scales. Previous studies have linked high teacher self-efficacy to positive academic outcomes for students.

Sezgin, F., & Erdogan, O. (2018). Humility and Forgiveness as Predictors of Teacher Self-Efficacy. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 13(4), 120-128.

While confidence has long been considered a prerequisite for effective leadership, we are learning that humility is equally important. As Oyer points out, previous research has shown that confidence unmitigated by humility can lead to arrogance and unethical leadership practices. To study the links between confidence, humility, and effective leadership, Oyer surveyed 137 teachers, asking for their perceptions of their principals' humility, confidence, and leadership effectiveness. In analyzing the survey data, Oyer found that humility and confidence correlated significantly with one another and also with leadership effectiveness. Interestingly, the relationship between humility and leader effectiveness was slightly stronger than the relationship between confidence and leader effectiveness. Additionally, overall, leader effectiveness was lowest when humility was lowest. While this study specifically examines the perceptions of teachers about their principals, its lessons are applicable for anyone in a leadership position.

Oyer, B.J. (2015). Teacher perceptions of principals' confidence, humility, and effectiveness: Implications for educational leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, 25(4), 684-719.

Brown, Vesely, and Dallman discuss concrete strategies for building "cultural humility" in teachers. Cultural humility is defined as "the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is...open to the other in relation to...cultural identity" (p. 77). Cultural humility requires continued reflection and self-evaluation, a sincere wish to correct power imbalances, and a commitment to advocate for and amplify the voices of those with less privilege. This article provides several ideas that educators can use to strengthen cultural humility. These include a diversity (and implicit bias) awareness activity, case study reviews, home visits, and community mapping activities.

Brown, E. L., Vesely, C. K., & Dallman, L. (2016). Unpacking Biases: Developing Cultural Humility in Early Childhood and Elementary Teacher Candidates.

In their article, Lund and Lee describe how one teacher education program used service learning to help teacher candidates move beyond a superficial understanding of cultural diversity and move instead towards cultural humility. The service learning placements were with community organizations serving ethnically diverse immigrant students. Pre- and post-service interviews showed that teacher candidates grew significantly in their openness to their students, their understanding of their students' strengths, and their awareness of and willingness to work on their implicit biases. Additionally, teacher candidates also grew in their humility. As one of them stated, "I learned a lot. But I know it is just the tip of the iceberg... I feel I have been exposed to it but I am not an expert. I'm still a White middle-class person, and there is only so far I can go. But definitely I have a better understanding than I did before" (p. 19). The authors caution that in order for such service learning opportunities to be successful, they must be deep, meaningful, and long-term, and not the "cultural safaris" so common in service learning programs. Additional advice for teacher education programs wishing to cultivate cultural humility is included in the article.

Lund, D., & Lee, L. (2015). Fostering cultural humility among pre-service teachers: Connecting with children and youth of immigrant families through service-learning. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 38(2), 1-30.

In the title of this article, "curious positions," refers to the "curious" or "odd" position of both student teachers and mentor teachers as they navigate their complicated working relationship with one another. While this use of the word "curious" was not intended to refer to a disposition of curiosity, the article is still a strong example of how approaching relationships with curiosity can lead to growth for all involved. In this study, Graham used interviews and journal exercises to explore the evolving relationship between a student teacher and her mentor teacher. The student teacher's openness to her mentor teacher's advice, along with her willingness to question his techniques and decisions, helped her to grow as a teacher. At the same time, the mentor teacher's curiosity and openness to his student teacher's ideas allowed him to listen to her critiques and reflect on his own habits and unconscious biases. This article is particularly recommended for new teachers, their mentors, and teacher educators.

Graham, P. (1993). Curious Positions: Reciprocity and Tensions in the Student Teacher/Cooperating Teacher Relationship. *English Education*, 25(4), 213-230.

Many teachers understand the importance of connecting with students through shared interests and experiences—as well as being open and curi-

ous even when it seems at first that teacher and student have few things in common. Gehlbach et al's study validates this practice. After administering a "getting to know you" questionnaire to 315 ninth grade students and their 25 teachers, researchers provided students and teachers with feedback on their similarities to one another. Five weeks later, teachers who had been informed of similarities with certain students perceived more positive relationships with those students than with control group students, and gave them higher grades than those given to control group students. Notably, this effect was particularly pronounced with students considered by the study to be from "disadvantaged groups."

Gehlbach, H., Brinkworth, M. E., King, A. M., Hsu, L. M., McIntyre, J., & Rogers, T. (2016). Creating birds of similar feathers: Leveraging similarity to improve teacher-student relationships and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 108*(3), 342.

This article provides an example of how schools can create more caring work environments for teachers, which in turn improves classroom culture for students. As explained by the authors, 59% of teachers report being under great stress in school—in 1985, only 35% of teachers reported feeling this stressed. At the same time, teacher job satisfaction dropped from 62% in 2008 to 39% in 2012. Jennings et al's article explores the effects of the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program, a mindfulness intervention designed to reduce stress and improve teachers' social-emotional skills. The study was conducted in 36 urban elementary schools. After the program's completion, surveys revealed that teachers' emotion regulation, mindfulness, mental health, and time urgency (anxiety over deadlines, and the feeling of needing to rush through tasks, activities, and even eating lunch) had significantly improved. At the same time, teachers' scores in the Emotional Support domain of the [Classroom Assessment Scoring System](#) observation tool improved significantly, suggesting that students benefited from the program as well. Schools interested in reducing teacher stress and creating a more caring environment for teachers might consider this program as a tool for achieving these goals.

Jennings, P. A., Brown, J. L., Frank, J. L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, Rasheed, D., De Weese, A., DeMauro, A.A., Cham, H., & Greenberg, M. T. (2017). Impacts of the CARE for Teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(7), 1010-1028.

After defining a list of the core elements and enabling conditions of caring school leadership, Louis et al explored two research questions: 1) "Are teachers' perceptions of their principals' caring behavior associated with their perceptions of the schools' provision of a supportive (caring) environment for

students...? 2) Are teachers' perceptions of principal and supportive school caring for students associated with student learning?" (p. 322). In order to answer these questions, the researchers surveyed 3,900 teachers in 134 schools. They discovered strong positive relationships between caring principal leadership, student academic support, and teachers' sense of collective responsibility for creating a positive learning environment. While of particular interest for those who wish to cultivate caring leadership in their schools, this article touches on a number of different aspects of Radically Reimagined Relationships, including joint ownership, responsibility, and accountability; the importance of risk-tolerant but safe environments; and authenticity in relationships.

Louis, K. S., Murphy, J., & Smylie, M. (2016). Caring leadership in schools: Findings from exploratory analyses. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 310-348.

In her Phi Delta Kappan article, Epstein highlights the importance of schools and families partnering to create caring school and home environments for children. Drawing on previously published research, she explains the concept of the three "overlapping spheres of influence" in children's lives: school, family, and community. When these spheres are disconnected or at odds with one another, children suffer. When intentional partnerships are built across and between these spheres, children thrive. Epstein then provides a number of sample practices, recommendations, and action steps that families, schools, and communities can use to enhance their partnerships with one another and create more caring environments for children.

Epstein, J. L. (2010). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(3), 81-96.

Johnson, Seidenfeld, Izard, and Kobak's study explores the effect of positive, emotionally supportive classroom environments on the social development of Head Start students. They used the [Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory](#) scale and the [Classroom Assessment Scoring System](#) observation tool to measure this relationship. This particular study focused on students with parents or guardians affected by depression, who began the study with lower levels of prosocial behavior. The authors found that students who experienced warm, positive relationships with their teachers improved their social-emotional skills and actually caught up with their peers whose home caregivers were not experiencing depression. Students who experienced negative relationships with their teachers, however, showed worsened social-emotional skills.

Johnson, S. R., Seidenfeld, A. M., Izard, C. E., & Kobak, R. (2012). Can classroom emotional support enhance prosocial development among children with depressed caregivers?. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 28(2), 282-290.

While much of the academic research on caring in schools focuses on the caring that teachers, families, and administrators show students, Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Jackson focus on the caring that students show each other. Specifically, they focus on the concept of Culturally Relevant Care, which the authors define as “a process in which one’s humanity is affirmed by building community, trust, warm demanding, and integrating the cultures and experiences of community members” (p. 986). In this article, the researchers describe a two-year study of a group of male Black and Latino high school students enrolled in an alternative school-based mentoring program for students who had been pushed out of more traditional schools. Through interviews with the students and their mentor, the researchers discovered that the mentor genuinely cared for the students as people and as learners and was committed to fighting the injustices that had landed them in his program in the first place. Notably, he also created an environment in which students cared for and helped one another through difficulties outside of school and pushed one another to work hard and achieve within school.

Watson, W., Sealey-Ruiz, Y., & Jackson, I. (2016). Daring to care: The role of culturally relevant care in mentoring Black and Latino male high school students. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 19*(5), 980-1002.

## ON SHARED PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Although this article was written during the No Child Left Behind era, its ideas are still relevant today. Like many progressive education-focused researchers, this author talks about the importance of schools being communities. This article is different, however, in that it specifically mentions shared vision and purpose as a key feature of creating community. Interestingly, in addition to pointing out the flaws in conservative school reform, the author also critiques some progressive education movements, noting that free schools where students study topics entirely of their own choosing are so individualistic that it can be difficult to build community. This article is an interesting read for those who wish to build community around shared purpose in their schools. The ideas in this article might be particularly relevant for leaders of larger schools: the author explicitly states that as long as there is shared purpose and vision, the ability to build strong community is not limited to small schools.

Strike, K. A. (2004). Community, the missing element of school reform: Why schools should be more like congregations than banks. *American Journal of Education, 110*(3), 215-232.

Traditionally, teachers and administrators have viewed students’ parents and guardians as private citizens whose involvement in schools centers around

their own children and whose activities should be dictated by school, not child or community, priorities. Warren, Mapp, and Kuttner argue for a different role for families: that of public actor. Unlike private citizens who are passively engaged in their children's education, public actors serve as community organizers who both demand accountability from schools and work hand-in-hand with schools towards improvement. This chapter describes six case studies of parent/community groups from marginalized communities who were able to effect transformational change in their local schools. In all cases, the authors found that these parents' transformation from passive private citizens to confident public actors was just as profound for them personally as the policy wins they achieved. Parents who had previously thought of themselves as powerless, or "not good at public speaking," discovered their capacity for leadership and lost their fear of advocating for their rights. This led to numerous positive changes for children and for the community as a whole. The authors conclude their chapter by urging schools to change the way they engage with parents. If they truly want to engage and collaborate with families, schools should stop putting on events and open houses that treat parents as visitors or occasional volunteers. Instead, they should encourage community building, organizing, and collaboration among parents/families, and school staff.

Warren, M. R., Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2015). From Private Citizens to Public Actors. In M.P. Evans & D.B. Hiatt-Michael (Eds.), *The Power of Community Engagement for Educational Change* (pp 21-40). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Bathgate, Colvin, and Silva's article shares the story of the Strive Partnership of Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky (Strive), an initiative to improve outcomes for youth in the Cincinnati area. Strive acknowledged that teachers and schools alone cannot solve the many complicated reasons behind racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps. For this reason, Strive brought together a coalition of community stakeholders including schools, nonprofits, foundations, colleges, government agencies, and businesses. Together, this coalition decided on and united around a shared vision and goals. They then decided on specific responsibilities for each partner, as well as systems for monitoring and evaluating progress. The Strive partnership demonstrated the power of shared purpose and responsibility at the wider community level. However, its lessons are relevant for those wishing to shift any system towards shared purpose and responsibility.

Bathgate, K., Colvin, R. L., & Silva, E. (2011). Striving for student success: A model of shared accountability. *Education Sector Report. USA: Washington, DC.*

In their article, Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, and Turnbull synthesize



two previous studies. These studies—one of which examined family-school partnerships and the other of which examined community-school partnerships—both focused on [SWIFT](#) (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation) Center schools. One of SWIFT's guiding principles is that school and district staff, families, and community members all share responsibility for students' success. In synthesizing the two studies, the authors found four common themes contributing to SWIFT's success in cultivating strong community-family-school partnerships characterized by shared purpose and responsibility. These were 1) positive, inviting, and inclusive school culture, 2) strong administrative leadership driven by a clear vision of inclusion, 3) attributes of trusting partnerships, and 4) opportunities for reciprocal partnership and involvement. While heavily focused on partnership and shared purpose, this article is also relevant to those interested in learning more about the importance of belonging, equity, and authentic relationship-building.

Haines, S. J., Gross, J. M., Blue-Banning, M., Francis, G. L., & Turnbull, A. P. (2015). Fostering family-school and community-school partnerships in inclusive schools: Using practice as a guide. *Research and Practice for persons with severe disabilities*, 40(3), 227-239.

This article provides a strong example of successful shared purpose and responsibility—the New Haven Accountability Task Force—an example that will be particularly interesting for readers hoping to promote shared responsibility in their own educational communities. When faced with low test scores in their city, the New Haven School District decided to take a different approach to solving the problem. The district created a task force which included diverse community stakeholders such as Board of Education members, school administrators, teachers, parents, business and faith community leaders, and university researchers, all of whom were led by a well-known child psychiatrist. Together, the task force created an accountability plan that assigned responsibilities to stakeholders at all levels of the education system. These included district administration, principals, teachers, parents, and students, as well as members of the wider community, including businesses, universities, faith-based organizations, and others. This article provides both a strong example of shared purpose and responsibility, and an extensive literature review of the topic.

Torre, C. A., & Voyce, C. (2007). *Shared accountability: An organic approach. Systems thinkers in action: A field guide for effective change leadership in education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Rallis and MacMullen's article introduces the concept of "inquiry-minded schools" and provides several examples of such schools. According to the authors, inquiry-minded school community members (including principals,

teachers, and parents) do not simply accept external accountability metrics such as test scores; rather, they engage in cycles of reflective inquiry to get at the root of their schools' strengths and weaknesses. In one case, the school had done very well by external metrics—98% passed the reading portion of the statewide standardized test, 100% passed in writing, and 97% passed in math. However, the group of parents, teachers, and principals gathered at a school council meeting were not content to declare victory. Through dialogue, reflection, and close scrutiny of the score reports, they came to the conclusion that there were still gaps and areas for improvement. They then discussed what success would look like for their school and devised a plan to achieve it. The concept of the inquiry-minded school is a useful one, particularly for schools wishing to move away from reliance on external accountability measures such as standardized testing and state-administered "school report cards."

Rallis, S. F., & MacMullen, M. M. (2000). Inquiry-minded schools: Opening doors for accountability. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(10), 766-773.

## ON AGENCY AND TRUST

Although not exclusively focused on education, this article has great relevance for school communities interested in equalizing the traditionally hierarchical relationships seen in schools (student-teacher, teacher-principal, principal-parent/guardian, etc.). The article might be particularly reassuring for school leaders who are interested in giving teachers and students more autonomy but feel apprehensive about giving up control. Through his review of the literature surrounding supervisors' motivational styles, agency, and engagement, Reeve explains that autonomy-supporting supervisor styles improve relationships between supervisor and supervisee (or teacher and student) and improve supervisees' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in their work. On the other hand, controlling behavior creates resentment, reduces engagement, and results in lower quality work.

Reeve, J. (2015). Giving and summoning autonomy support in hierarchical relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9(8), 406-418.

This study examines the relationships between teacher leadership, "collective efficacy," and trust within schools. Using separate surveys to measure each of these three constructs, the researchers conducted their study within 10 schools. The study found strong correlations between all three of these variables, suggesting that when teachers trust their colleagues and are confident in their colleagues' effectiveness, they are more likely to encourage their peers to take on leadership roles and assume leadership roles themselves. The authors also found that "teacher leadership" is not about one or two star

teachers leading all the others, but about creating a culture that gives all teachers agency, encourages collaboration, and trusts all teachers to take on different kinds of leadership roles.

Angelle, P. S., Nixon, T. J., Norton, E. M., & Niles, C. A. (2011, November). Increasing organizational effectiveness: An examination of teacher leadership, collective efficacy, and trust in schools. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, Pittsburgh, PA.

This ethnographic study draws on interviews with six different classroom teachers. The article begins by introducing the controversy of teacher agency: while some schools see promoting teacher agency as an important part of improving the educational experience for children, others see it as a flaw that interferes with the faithful implementation of evidence-based approaches. The authors were interested in seeing the ways in which teachers' beliefs about children, teaching, and the purpose of education affected their sense of agency. They found that many of the teachers' beliefs were conflicted. For example, while all were professional, hardworking, well-versed in progressive pedagogy, and dedicated to their students, many did not feel that they had agency to find different ways to reach their more challenging students. The authors concluded that individual teacher beliefs are important in fostering teacher agency but are not enough: the entire environment surrounding teachers needs to support their agency and needs to allow them to live out their beliefs.

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 624-640.

This article will be useful for anyone interested in diving into the research on trust in schools, as it provides an extensive review of the literature on this topic. It also provides a wealth of principals' own ideas of how to build and sustain a culture of trust. To collect these ideas, the authors surveyed 177 principals in Canada. The survey, designed to support a qualitative analysis of principal views, contained mostly open-ended questions. The principals who responded to the survey agreed that establishing trust with teachers and families was a crucial (and challenging) part of their work. The biggest challenges mentioned by principals included an existing culture of mistrust, poor relationships with principals in the past, and cultural and racial differences with teachers. Maintaining and sustaining trust was often even more challenging: it required frequent collaboration with teachers, remaining approachable and involved in the life of the school, open communication, and commitment to creating a culture of trust in school. While this article will likely confirm what many principals already know, it may be useful in winning over those who may not believe in the importance of establishing an environment of trust.

Kutsyuruba, B., Walker, K., & Noonan, B. (2010). The ecology of trust in the principalship. *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 21(1), 23-47.

This dissertation begins by reviewing the foundation of established research demonstrating that trust in schools correlates positively with student performance, and trust in principals correlates positively with trust within schools. It then seeks to identify the qualities and behaviors that principals must display in order to build trust. After surveying teachers in 138 schools, the author identified three high trust and three low trust schools. She then conducted teacher and principal interviews within each of these six schools. Through the interviews, the researcher discovered a long list of principal qualities that predicted trust in schools. The four that seemed to be the most important were competence in carrying out the work of leading a school, consistency (especially as to expectations, feedback, and communication with families), reliability, and openness to shared decision-making, teacher leadership, and new ideas. School leaders who wish to cultivate trust within their schools and those in charge of selecting or mentoring school leaders might be especially interested in this dissertation.

Handford, V. (2011). Why teachers trust school leaders. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

As Auerbach notes, school and district leaders often “talk the talk” when it comes to building trusting relationships with students’ families. However, many find it difficult to “walk the walk,” particularly in under-resourced urban schools. Auerbach’s paper provides qualitative case studies of four school leaders who are “walking the walk” in Los Angeles. Unlike many principals who see family engagement mainly as a tool to boost student achievement and attain school goals, these principals were committed to empowering parents as partners in improving their schools and communities. Their initiatives included the following: a parent colloquium entitled “Breaking the Cycle of Poverty and Violence through Education” during which families were both supported and empowered to make change in their communities; a Parents as Authors program; regular “house meetings” that brought families and school staff together to discuss common goals and challenges; and home visits designed to building trusting relationships. Common themes in these principals’ philosophies included a proactive stance, a social justice orientation, passion for community and relationship building, commitment to multi-lingual programming, and interest in learning from other family engagement models.

Auerbach, S. (2009). Walking the Walk: Portraits in Leadership for Family Engagement in Urban Schools. *School Community Journal*, 19(1), 9-32.

As the other articles cited in this section demonstrate, there is a great deal of research demonstrating the importance of trust between teachers, principals, and families. However, there is less research discussing the importance of students being able to trust their teachers and school leaders. Romero's study explores this idea using nationally representative student survey data from the Educational Longitudinal Study. Romero found that when students had trust in their teachers and principals, they were more likely to achieve academically and less likely to have behavior issues. This was true regardless of students' socioeconomic status or prior academic standing, as well as school size. This study provides a strong argument for building strong, trusting relationships with students, as even the most rigorous efforts to increase student performance are unlikely to work without a climate of trust.

Romero, L. S. (2015). Trust, behavior, and high school outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(2), 215-236.

## ABOUT ASTRA CENTER FOR INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

The Astra Center for Innovative Education affirms the critical role that relationships play in learning environments. We promote educational models that demonstrate Radically Reimagined Relationships - a commitment to creating and sustaining genuine, thoughtful, and meaningful connections between and among students, staff, and families in an environment of equity and racial justice. Our work centers around researching schools and school models, reporting on the impact of relationship-building, engaging schools and like-minded organizations that share this philosophy, and working directly with schools to build capacity. Learn more about our work at [www.astrafoundation.org/center-for-innovative-education](http://www.astrafoundation.org/center-for-innovative-education).

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*On the cover:* Students engaged in outdoor learning at the Science and Mathematics Institute, a public high school in Tacoma, WA. Photo courtesy of SaMI, one of the schools featured in Astra's *Radically Reimagined Relationships* report.

