



Healing Schools: A Framework for Joining Trauma-Informed Care, Restorative Justice, and Multicultural Education for Whole School Reform

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Abstract

Trauma-informed Care (TIC), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Multicultural Education (MCE) are three approaches to school reform widely being discussed and promoted within schools. The authors of this paper, representing the fields of psychology, social work, and education, present an integrated framework that acknowledges the commonalities these three models share, as well as the ways that they complement one another by focusing our attention on different aspects of urban education. We argue that the concept of healing offers a powerful heuristic for systemic school reform — a guide for rethinking how we address pedagogical, disciplinary, curricular, and policy decisions. We are calling for the creation of “healing schools,” arguing that, 1) Schools can play a valuable role in promoting healing and well-being among the students and families with whom they engage and 2) Many of our urban schools themselves need healing because they have become systems of toxic environments for adults and youth alike. To address the need for healing in schools, we present a framework promoting four key values: relationships, safety, belonging, and agency. These values are embedded within an ecological perspective, exploring how they manifest at the internal, student, school, and community/society levels.

Keywords Trauma-Informed Care · Restorative Justice · Multicultural Education · Whole-school approach · Schools

Over the past twenty years, there has been increasing recognition that schools cannot successfully educate all students without addressing the harm and trauma that many youth experience both in and out of school. Drawing on lessons from medicine, public health, neurology, psychology, and other fields, education researchers are beginning to document the effects of harm and trauma on young people’s educational and developmental trajectories, and outlining roles that educators can play in supporting

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healing and resilience (e.g. Ginwright, 2010, 2016; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000; Walkley & Cox, 2013).

The idea that schools should focus efforts on *healing* is anathema to some, who maintain a narrow view of the purpose of schools, and overwhelming to others, who worry that schools simply cannot take on the burden of addressing health alongside everything else we expect from our education system. Urban schools in particular are often under resourced and overburdened as students, educators, and families reckon with concentrated poverty, violence, and other racialized legacies of the history of US cities (Rothstein, 2017). Still, urban schools are impacted by, and implicated in, the systems that cause harm to young people, and healing can be a prerequisite to achieving other educational goals. And urban schools often have unique assets to bring to this work — namely, communities with a high level of cultural and linguistic diversity that, though often treated as a problem, has been underleveraged in efforts to improve schools.

In fact, we argue that the concept of healing offers a powerful heuristic for systemic school reform — a guide for rethinking how we address pedagogical, disciplinary, curricular, and policy decisions. We are calling for the creation of “healing schools” in two senses. First, we believe that urban schools can play a valuable role in promoting healing and well-being among the students and families with whom they engage (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Second, we recognize that many of our urban schools themselves need healing because they have become toxic environments for adults and youth alike (Ginwright, 2010).

School reform goes beyond the individual and focuses on the “power of the collective” and “reform from within” (Leana, 2011, para. 18). Often school reform misses “system fit,” with new frameworks applied without considering the nuances of the school’s current culture and practices (McIntyre, 2019). The framework we present in this article, then, is not a prescriptive set of practices and policies. Rather, we offer a guide for schools to do the work of transformation through collective dialogue, action, and reflection in pursuit of key values.

Healing, here, refers to a multi-layered, ecological process that addresses well-being and resilience on the individual, school, and community/societal level. Rooted in relationships and based on an understanding that much of the trauma our students face is the result of systemic oppression, this conception of healing is inextricable from that of justice. As Shawn Ginwright (2016) explains in his powerful book, *Hope and Healing in Urban Education*, healing should be a political act, rooted in social justice.

“Healing is political because those that focus on healing in urban communities recognize how structural oppression threatens the well-being of individuals and communities, and understands well-being as a collective necessity rather than an individual choice... community organizing and acting in ways that improve communities builds a sense of control, agency, and self-determination, which are important for collective well-being.” (p. 8)

This article is not about increasing access to health and social services. Rather, it is about how schools can promote individual and collective healing in the process of

carrying out traditional school activities like teaching and learning. Nor is this article about working from deficit views of youth and families as broken or needy. People are much more than their traumas, and many of the most valuable resources for promoting resilience and health are found in the knowledge, cultural wealth, and agency of students and their communities (Ginwright, 2016, 2018; Yosso, 2005).

The framework in this article represents an effort to combine the insights of three school reform movements: Trauma-informed Care (TIC), Restorative Justice (RJ), and Multicultural Education (MCE). These three approaches are widely discussed among educators and researchers, yet there is limited literature on their intersections. This can be particularly frustrating when it comes to training teachers and administrators, as the approaches are presented as quite distinct with little guidance on how to merge them into a holistic approach to school improvement. In actuality, these three approaches share fundamental concerns, intersect and reinforce one another in some areas, and complement one another in other areas where each historically falls short.

Healing Through Three Lenses

This article is premised on the understanding that trauma and harm, along with resilience and healing, are intertwined aspects of the life stories of many of our students. It is estimated that 35,000 students in our urban schools have experienced at least one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), a traumatic event or ongoing experience such as physical or emotional abuse, parental incarceration, or an episode of violence in the neighborhood (Felitti et al., 1998). Instances of discrimination, harassment, and aggression based on, for example, racial or gender/sexual identity are also common sources of traumatic stress for young people, though often not included in the ACE literature (Carter, 2007; Diaz & Kosciw, 2009).

These individual traumas/resiliencies are often linked to collective traumas/resiliencies affecting the broader communities of which students are a part. Collective trauma refers to “the shared injuries to a population’s social, cultural, and physical ecologies” (Saul, 2013, p. 1), and can include relational trauma (harm to the fabric of important relationships in a family or community), cultural trauma (harm to the shared consciousness and identity of a collective), and historical trauma, or the cumulative impact of harm over multiple generations of systemic oppression (Alexander et al., 2004; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2013; Saul, 2013).

The effects of these traumas/resiliencies are brought into school. Trauma and violence can have significant impacts on students’ school experiences, as evidenced by indicators like lower reading achievement, increased behavior problems, and decreased school attendance (Ko et al., 2008). And the systems that perpetuate trauma do not stop at the school walls. Young people can be harmed or (re)traumatized in school through experiences such as homophobic bullying the complex system of practices, beliefs, and policies that have come to be known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Bahena et al., 2012; Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). Nor are adults in schools immune, whether due to their own challenging life experiences, secondary trauma from working with students, or the experience of dehumanizing and stressful school climates (Alisic, 2012; Dworkin, 2009).

The prevalence of individual and collective trauma calls for individual and collective healing. In addition to addressing immediate health needs, healing is about building individual and communal resilience, or the capacity to recover from and overcome adversity in ways that often leave one stronger and more prepared for future adversity. Our students, families, and communities already have access to valuable sources of resilience — in their familial and social networks, their languages, cultural practices, and belief systems, their stories and identities, their histories of organizing, etc. (Saul, 2013; Yosso, 2005). Creating opportunities to increase resilience is about recognizing and strengthening these existing capacities while addressing the systems that perpetuate harm in our communities in the first place. How does this kind of work take place in urban schools? To answer this question, we draw on three popular but often thinly-applied approaches to school reform.

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma informed care (TIC) has its roots in the feminist movement and the establishment of rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters in the 1970's (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1974). This emphasis extended to child advocacy centers in the 1980's (National Children's Advocacy Center, 2018) and became a focus in schools when the well-known ACE study revealed that traumatic events have negative outcomes that impact many children (Felitti et al., 1998; Whitfield, 1998). Research has shown that children who have experienced these events are likely to have "risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death" (CDC, 2016, para. 2). Since the ACE study, a few states including Massachusetts, Wisconsin, California, and Washington, have adopted trauma-informed approaches within their school systems. These approaches are rooted in understanding the awareness of the impact of trauma, knowledge of the signs and symptoms of trauma, responsive practices to consider the holistic needs of the student and lastly to avoid further trauma in the schools (SAMHSA, 2014). Within these frameworks there is variability in how they are applied but at the core of these approaches, Bath (2008) argues, are three pillars: safety, connections, and managing emotions.

A child's sense of *safety* is threatened when they experience trauma. Thus, it is imperative that urban schools provide an atmosphere of physical and emotional safety within the school environment not only for children who have experienced trauma, but for all children. Sense of safety is rooted in relationships. Bath (2008) argues that "positive relationships are necessary for healthy human development, but trauma undermines these life-giving connections" (p.19). Schools are filled with adults who can offer such "life-giving connections." *Connection*, therefore, is the second pillar. Purposeful and meaningful connections with teachers, administrators, and staff can be the corrective emotional experiences that children need when they have experienced trauma, often at the hands of adults. Connections in the classroom with peers and teachers can create an atmosphere of emotional safety, which supports healing. And positive relationships with teachers and the school can promote not only pro-social behavior, but deeper engagement in learning.

The final pillar of TIC is *managing emotions*. Emotional regulation and dysregulation, the ability or inability to adjust our emotional responses within a given context

(internal or external) works to help students make connections between emotion and behavior while also understanding its impact on relationships. The trauma that children experience can rewire their brains towards dysregulation (Siegel & Solomon, 2003) and can have them vacillating from either feeling too much or not feeling at all. Allowing space for a child to feel and tolerate distress is integral in learning to understand and express their emotions. As children learn to regulate in the context of their relationships with peers and teachers, they can work towards building connections and feeling safe. Trauma informed care, however, on its own falls short of holding a safe and supportive space for students as it misses the mark in addressing the needs of urban students who may be at higher risk for trauma (Gherardi et al., 2020).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice (RJ) is a multi-layered concept (Reimer, 2015), which originated in the criminal justice system in the mid-1970s; however, its guiding principles predate Western society. The roots of RJ are thought to stem from Indigenous and spiritual peacemaking traditions and practices which emphasize the interconnectedness of humanity and collective responsibility for building and repairing community (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). Justice is understood as a violation of a relationship rather than as a judgment of right versus wrong (Zehr, 2005). When a community member commits a violation, they are expected to face those they harmed and make a commitment to rectify the problem, restoring relationships and making right with the community.

In the school context RJ is used in a broader sense, with three interconnected components: (1) creating just and equitable learning environments; (2) nurturing healthy relationships; and (3) repairing harm and transforming conflict (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Practices associated with RJ can be used responsively to promote healing of harm or brokenness within relationships as well as proactively to build relationships, socio-emotional and problem-solving skills, and the overall capacity of students and adults to resolve conflict. Examples of restorative practices in urban schools include restorative questioning, community building circles, and restorative conferencing. These practices are rooted in principles of relationality, equal participation, and dialogue. When responding to harm, principles include a holistic and contextualized understanding and response to the harm, inclusive decision-making, and needs-based and forward-focused approach (Llewellyn et al., 2013).

RJ can be an “opportunity pipeline” for students who are especially vulnerable, including those who have experienced trauma (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014). RJ builds on students’ strengths, creates connections between students and educators, and can safeguard students’ resilience. RJ pushes back against an understanding of academic challenges and student misbehavior as purposeful misconduct requiring punishment. Instead, RJ seeks to create a school culture where supportive and healthy relationships are developed, modeled, and when necessary repaired, shifting from a culture of social control to one emphasizing social engagement (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015) state, “there is untapped potential in the capacity of schools to be sanctuaries in the lives of stressed children and adults by creating the space for ongoing relational connection” (p. 8). Whole-school imple-

mentation of RJ can support the transformation of school structures and students' lives, the creation of equitable and humane conditions and relationships throughout the school community, and the reduction in high levels of disadvantage and exclusion (Drewery, 2016).

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education (MCE) emerged from the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s and first took hold in the form of ethnic studies in higher education (Banks, 1989). It challenged the prevailing model of monocultural education, predicated on assimilating culturally and linguistically diverse students into a dominant white national culture. Since then, the movement has expanded to address issues related to race, gender, ethnicity, class, language, sexuality, ability, and other axes of identity and oppression (Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). MCE serves as an umbrella term for a wide range of approaches based on diverse theories and assumptions. What these approaches share is the goal of ensuring educational equity and opportunity for all students within a diverse and pluralistic society (Sleeter & Grant, 2003).

As an approach to whole-school reform, multicultural education can infuse all aspects of the educational endeavor. There are significant literatures about how to develop curricula that decenter dominant narratives and integrate a multivocal array of perspectives, histories, knowledges, and experiences (May & Sleeter, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2003); pedagogies that build on the cultural wealth of young people and engage them in critically addressing injustice (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amante, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012; Yosso, 2005); policies like detracking & inclusion that distribute resources equitably and challenge assumptions of who can and cannot succeed in school (Banks, 1989); dual language programs and other efforts to sustain heritage languages in school (Torres-Guzmán, 2007); teacher training that supports educators in confronting biases and developing multicultural and antiracist orientations (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Vavrus, 2002); and school cultures that are welcoming for, and honoring of, students' families and communities (Dantas & Manyak, 2011); among other approaches.

We use the term MCE to refer not to a specific set of techniques, but rather as an overall orientation toward schooling. Other practices such as culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy are inclusive within our conception of MCE (Ladson-Billings, 2021, Milner, 2011). MCE is rooted in an understanding that learning takes place within a broader sociopolitical context that includes long histories of racialization, oppression, colonialism, and inequitable distribution of power and resources (Nieto, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). In this context, urban education must prepare all students as critical actors who can both navigate and work collectively to change these power structures. It understands cultures not as static or monolithic, but rather as fluid, contested, and evolving. Following the work of Nieto (2004), multicultural education, is 1) antiracist and anti-discriminatory, 2) targeted at all students, 3) oriented toward social justice, 4) rooted in critical pedagogy, 5) a process rather than an end state, and 6) a basic education for how to live well in a multicultural world.

Integrating the Three Approaches

Despite having different primary focuses and distinct languages, these three approaches are grounded in similar values and goals. All three provide a lens for understanding and impacting relationships within the school environment. They seek the creation of a positive school climate, where students and adults experience a sense of belonging and connectedness. All three address students individually and holistically as full and unique people. They also understand students in context, as members of families and communities with past experiences and histories. They are strengths- and resiliency-based, require an attitude shift on behalf of educators, and take significant time to take root. The three approaches are misunderstood in similar ways as well. They are often thought of as targeted interventions focused on specific students (e.g., traumatized students, students of color) in response to problems of student behavior and low academic achievement. However, they are much more than that. When implemented fully, these three approaches are proactive efforts to advance development, growth, learning, and empowerment for all students (See Fig. 1).

In addition to sharing commonalities, these three approaches can be complementary, focusing attention on different facets of students' experiences and shoring one another up where each fall short. TIC is particularly useful for drawing our attention to the inner life of students, the lasting impacts of life experiences outside of school, and the need to attend to students' emotional landscapes. TIC brings ideas of trauma, healing, and resilience to the forefront in terms of individual traumas related to violence, abuse, and family life. However, TIC often misses the need to move beyond individual trauma/resiliency toward an environment that fosters learning, equity, and well-being, and has done less to focus our attention on more collective and systemic traumas/resiliencies related to racism, oppression, and poverty. Ginwright (2018), for example, has challenged the limited scope of TIC and its potential for deficit views of students. In the critical analysis of trauma-sensitive schools, Gherardi et al. (2020) calls for the integration of social justice education to address the gaps within the TIC.

RJ, in turn, focuses our attention on the school as a community. It offers tools for collective healing and creates opportunities for students to be leaders in building a strong community. It actively disrupts processes of punishment, policing, and exclusion that can (re)traumatize young people and funnel youth into the criminal justice system. At the same time, RJ can lack an understanding of how trauma impacts the ability of children to develop the trusting relationships necessary for restorative practices to work. Moreover, it has been critiqued as falling short of addressing the larger structural systems that oppress young people and for not paying enough attention to issues of race and inequity, with some calling for more critical and transformative approaches (Joseph et al., 2021; Wadhwa, 2016).

MCE at its best draws attention to how urban education takes place within a broader social, political, cultural, and historical context. Students and teachers come to class not only as members of a school community, but also embedded in diverse and overlapping communities, institutions, and systems that shape the educational experience in positive and negative ways. MCE challenges both the current and cumulative harm of systems of oppression such as racism and heterosexism and highlights the long histories of resistance and transformative organizing carried out by communities that

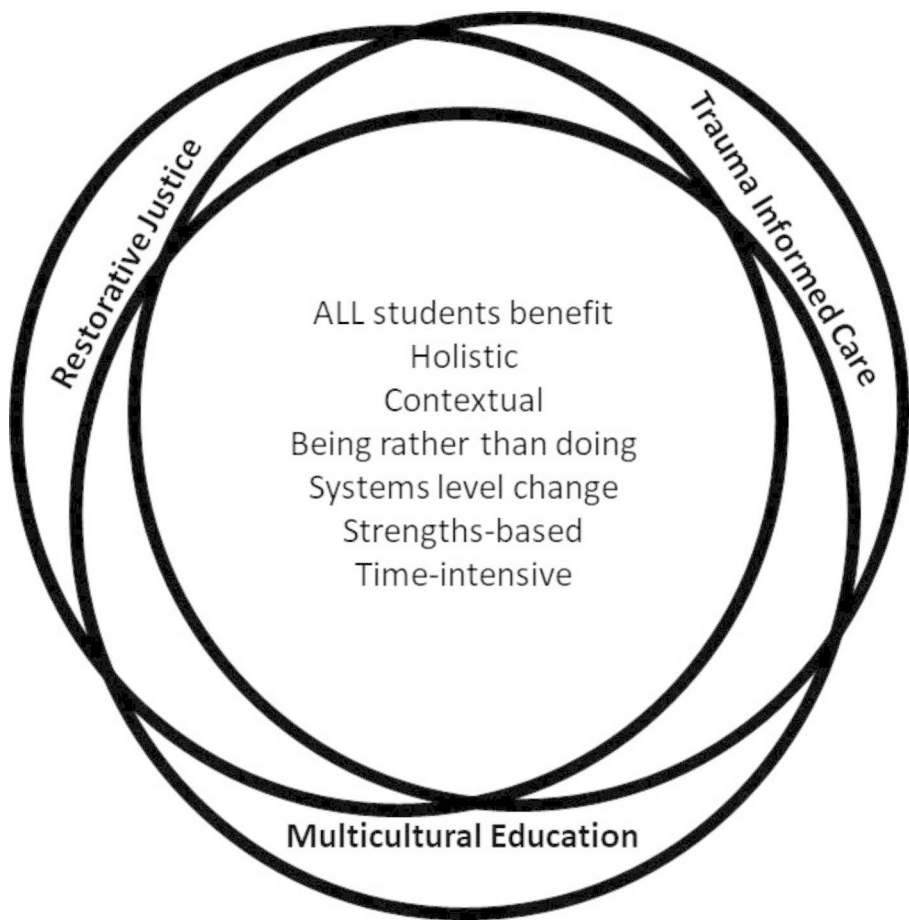


Fig. 1 Commonalities between TIC, RJ, and MCE

have been most harmed by these systems. At the same time, multicultural education has been roundly criticized for having lofty goals but being implemented in “add-on” ways that do not challenge the status-quo. Moreover, MCE does not usually integrate an explicitly trauma-informed lens or emphasize the need for restorative practices as part of engaging youth in social critique and action.

This is a simplification. Practitioners of TIC often pay attention to questions of school community, RJ can engage youth in addressing broader systems of inequality, and MCE pays attention to the internal life of students in terms of identity development. However, we feel these overlaps only strengthen our case that these three approaches have much in common. Initial attempts have been made to document the theoretical linkages as well as the relevance and importance of taking a trauma-informed approach in RJ within the criminal justice system (Randall & Haskell, 2013) and urban education (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). Nevertheless, this work has had limited reach when it comes to training, practice, and research. Similarly, the role of RJ in reducing disparities in disciplinary action for minoritized students

has begun to gain attention (Kline, 2016; Skiba et al., 2016), and some initial efforts to combine multicultural and restorative practices have been documented (Bintliff, 2011). However, no focus has been given to bringing TIC, RJ, and MCE under one umbrella.

Healing Schools: A Values-Based and Ecological Approach

At the core of these three approaches to school reform is the idea of leveraging relationships to promote an equitable and just learning environment that takes into account the broader contexts within which urban education takes place. Rather than seeing these approaches as having three distinct applications (or worse, as competing imperatives) our model proposes that urban schools develop interrelated practices based on a set of core values: relationships, belonging, safety, and agency. By starting with values, as opposed to practices, we seek to highlight the importance of culture shift in implementing these three approaches to school reform, as well as the need to adapt practices based on school and community contexts. Training and implementation based on values allows for greater internalization and motivation towards a “way of being” with students rather than a “way of doing” (Williams et al., 2016). We refer to this as “values-based implementation.”

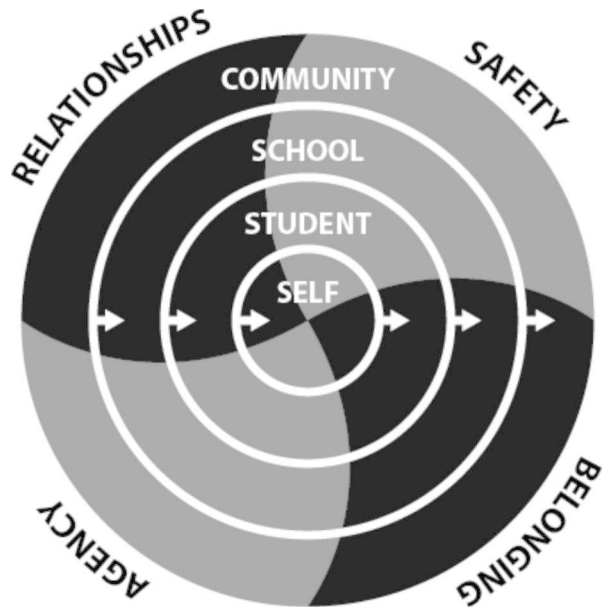
While working toward these core values will have multiple outcomes, we conceptualize the framework broadly as a process of healing. It is about healing *from* past experiences of trauma and harm to ourselves and our communities so that these experiences do not interfere with positive learning and development and so that we can find in them new sources of strength. It is about healing *through* relationships that promote a sense of safety, belonging, shared responsibility, and shared power. Ultimately, it is about healing *towards* community that strengthens resiliency, upholds equity and justice, and supports our individual and collective agency to define our paths in the world and have an impact in the systems that affect us.

Below we explore the rationale for, and enactment of, the four key values in our framework. We break each down into four scales, or levels, at which this work must take place: the internal work that educators do to fully internalize and authentically enact these values; how the values are enacted at the micro level through interpersonal interactions with students; how these values can inform structures, policies, and culture at the school level; and ways of enacting these values in relation to the broader community and society. We refer to these levels as self, student, school, and community (see Fig. 2).

Relationships

Trauma and injustice undermine our ability to form the healthy relationships that are required for personal development and community wellbeing (Bath, 2008; Zurbruggen, Gobin, & Kaehler, 2012). Therefore, caring and authentic relationships must be at the center of efforts to build resilience and health. From TIC, we recognize “comfortable connections” with caring adults as key to promoting healing and ensuring a sense of safety (Bath, 2008). From RJ we draw a definition of justice rooted

Fig. 2 Framework for healing schools: a values-based ecosystemic model



in people's interconnectedness and recognize the importance of relational ecologies in schools rooted in respect, acceptance, and reciprocity (Brown, 2018; Vaandering, 2011). From MCE, we expand the importance of relationships to encompass families and communities, and the larger social and cultural forces impacting our relationships (Dantas & Manyak, 2011; Nieto, 2004).

Building relationships across differences in age, race, culture, language, and experience begins with educators having critical self-awareness: an understanding of their relational styles and approaches to conflict, their identities and biases, and their positioning within systems of power (Hidalgo, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Educators are called on to examine how their values and beliefs shape the way they see the world and act within it (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). They are also called on to develop cultural humility: an orientation in which educators don't assume cultural superiority or cultural competence, but rather are committed to learning with others, seeing the world in new ways, and challenging systems that privilege one culture over another (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). This self-work prepares educators to interact with students and families in an individualized, contextualized, and meaningful way.

Healing schools rely on student-teacher relationships that are caring, nonjudgmental, trusting, and affirming of students that don't fit the dominant culture (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Relationship building takes place both in and out of formal learning environments and should include consideration of the teacher and student as whole people including roles, identities, experiences (including experiences of trauma/resilience), communication styles, and situatedness in families and communities. For educators, this involves inquiry into the identities and experiences of youth. This is aided by learning about the histories and cultures of the communities from which students come, and by developing a sociopolitical consciousness that includes a critique

Table 1 Four values of healing schools

	Relationships	Safety	Belonging	Agency
Self	What is my approach to building relationships? How is this impacted by my values, beliefs, experiences, and social identities?	How am I communicating safety/unsafety through my individual actions and the way I carry out institutional processes?	What is my own sense of (dis) belonging in the school and what influences those feelings?	Where and in what ways do I feel a sense of agency in my life and in my school?
Student	How can I create opportunities for authentic adult-student and student-student relationships building?	How do I communicate safety promote a culture of kindness, openness, and anti-oppression in the classroom?	What are my students' key identities and experiences and how can I create a classroom environment in which those are honored?	In what ways could students be more involved in decisions about their educations and classrooms?
School	What practices will help us build a relational culture in the school marked by shared understanding, pluralism, and interdependence?	What is our shared vision for promoting safety and interrupting unsafety, and how do we ensure it is consistently applied?	How can we shift policies that rely on exclusion and assimilation toward inclusion and pluralism?	How can we create or improve systems for teachers, students, and families to be involved in school-level decision making?
Community/ Society	How can we create opportunities and structures that encourage authentic relationships with families?	How might we collaborate with families and community partners to address safety concerns in the community?	How do we create a sense of belonging for and to our students' families?	What is the schools' role in working with families and students to critically engage with and play leadership roles in the community?

of how schools perpetuate inequity. Ultimately, though, it must be about working collaboratively with students to understand one another's' complex identities and histories (Nieto, 2004; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Healing schools call for fostering classroom communities that are characterized by respect for each person's unique lived experiences, cultural background, and truth; accountability to the group for one's actions; and a recognition of our shared human dignity and interconnection (Armster & Amstutz, 2008; Smith et al., 2015). Students are honored for the unique gifts they bring into the community, and room is made for students to practice their own out-of-school manners of interacting, communicating, learning, and building relationships with one another (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Classroom communities like this model for students the social and interpersonal relationships that will be critical for their growth and development (Amstutz et al., 2018; Hendry, 2009) and offer a corrective emotional experience where students can heal from interpersonal ruptures in prior and current relationships (Straus, 2016).

Healing at the level of the school community can begin when a focus on relationships is infused throughout the school (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Taking a "whole-school approach" to relationships means paying attention to the relationships among faculty and staff as well as with students (Hendry, 2009). Strong and trusting relationships among adults can serve as models for students and increase the capacity

of educators to lead collective change. Building a relational culture across the school can be supported by instituting certain rituals and practices (e.g., community building circles, one-on-one meetings) and by directly addressing ruptures in the relational ecology of the school, including individual and collective traumas and day-to-day forms of oppression and marginalization (Hendry, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Students come to school as part of families and communities. These spheres of influence play a role in a student's growth and development, and students benefit when there is connection and collaboration between them (Epstein et al., 2018). Unfortunately, in many urban schools — particularly in low-wealth communities, communities of color, and (im)migrant communities — school-community relationships are marked by histories of disconnection, distrust, and deficit approaches to families (Dantas & Manyak, 2011). Building relationships between school staff and families/community members is a necessary step in healing these rifts and building the capacity of schools *and* families to support students (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). These relationships help teachers better understand the life experiences and cultural perspectives of students, help parents better understand their children's experiences and goals in school, and set the groundwork for authentic, trusting partnerships that honor what each brings to the table (Dantas & Manyak, 2011).

Safety

Safety, or the initial trust that develops early in one's life through primary relationships with our caretaker, is often the foundation of our future relationships. However, exposure to trauma “destroys...the fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation” (Herman 1997, p. 51). This includes the many young people in our communities who face ongoing threats of bias, discrimination, and violence based on their race, sexual orientation, gender, immigration status, ability, etc. (Bonnie et al., 2014). Establishing safety within schools, then, becomes fundamental to creating an environment for healing and learning. Schools can become a “blanket of safety comprehensive enough to cover every space and every person” (Cole et al., 2013, p. 21). Unfortunately, schools themselves are often fraught with potential threats, including interpersonal violence, bullying, discrimination, and the intrusion of the criminal justice system. Creating a culture of safety requires addressing diverse facets of the school, from the physical building, to student-teacher relationships, to interactions with parents and community (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Nurturing safety in the school begins with educators developing an understanding of themselves as embodied individuals with particular ways of moving and being in the world. This understanding is continually moving and shifting, and rooted in our cultural background and evolving understanding of ourselves as raced, gendered, sexualized, and (dis)abled individuals. Educators need to develop an understanding of how one's physicality can be (mis)interpreted across cultures and in response to traumatic experiences. In addition, educators need to examine how approaches to “safety” in schools that rely on policing and control (e.g., metal detectors, police officers in school) may end up leading to greater *unsafety* for certain students (e.g.,

students of color) for whom this raises risks of being profiled and caught up in the criminal justice system.

For students who have experienced harm and trauma, relationships with educators are central to establishing safety in the schools. Educators have the potential become the secondary relationships for children in safeguarding these assumptions of self, the world, and others. This requires the maintenance of trusting relationships that offer predictability and consistency. It also requires close attention to classroom culture, promoting a culture of kindness and openness that is free of bullying and disrupts and addresses oppression (verbal, physical, emotional and relational) (Morrison, 2006). Educators can also support processes of safe self-exploration among students, so that students can build a sense of personal safety and a trust in their bodies that comes from understanding more of themselves. The school environment then becomes a place to explore *who am I, how do I experience the world, how do I feel, how do I react, and what do I do*. Much of this work is through self-understanding and self-regulation that comes from relational ruptures and the repair that must happen (Hendry, 2009). But this rupture and repair does not happen in a siloed way; instead we interact with others that connect us within a web of safety — peers and adults in the classroom are also trying to explore and understand their needs of safety.

Creating a school that ensures physical, emotional and psychological safety requires a school-wide culture of “reliability, predictability, availability, honesty, and transparency” (Bath, 2008, p. 19)” and a culture of empowerment, resilience, challenge and risk-taking. Creating the idea that schools are ok, adults are ok, and that the child will be ok are vital to reinforce within the school environment and every interaction, as is the concerted effort to engage and collectively address bullying, interpersonal violence, microaggressions, and oppression (Greenwald, 2005). Staff and administration can further the feelings of safety in their interactions with students and teachers by creating a similar atmosphere to that which is fostered in the classroom (Brown, 2018). It is also important to ensure that there is predictability across classrooms and teachers as well as other spaces such as lunch room, halls, and principals’ offices. This requires a school community — adults and youth alike — that adopts a clear vision and plan for creating safe spaces and a way to discuss and address when spaces are unsafe. A student who walks in the cafeteria or P.E. or the front office can know that they can trust the adults to maintain their feelings of safety through structure, limit setting and communication (how and what they communicate). For example, discipline systems/practices that are consistent across the school (from the cafeteria to the front office) regardless what space you are in, rather than at the whim or personality of the adult implementing the practice.

Community sense of safety is often mirrored in the school and vice versa. Threats to the broader community — e.g., violence, over-policing, deportations — affect whether and in what state students arrive at school. There is a need, then, to collectively address these realities, from safety for children to walk to and from school or the ride the bus to larger community’s general sense of safety from physical and emotional harm. This calls for concerted efforts on the school to reach out to parents and community partners to engage them in co-creating safe spaces at school, in the home, and in the community. The school can be a strong partner with organized communities in addressing issues of violence, racism, and other forms of oppression

in their neighborhoods (Warren & Mapp, 2011). In addition, educators can engage students in learning and dialoguing about issues of violence and safety their communities and schools, and taking action to change them, through various forms of critical pedagogy and youth organizing (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Belonging

Belonging — being part of groups in which you feel respected and supported, where “the group is important to them and they are important to the group” — is recognized by many psychologists as a core human need, “almost as compelling a need as food” (Baumeister et al., 1995, p. 498; Maslow, 1970). Research has linked experiences of belonging to many aspects of wellbeing including self-esteem and the ability to manage stress, as well as protecting against loneliness, mental illness, and depression (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Whether or not students feel they “belong” within their school contexts has significant impact on their motivation, engagement, behavior, achievement, and hope (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Ma, 2003; Ostermann, 2000; Ryan et al., 2000; Wingspread, 2004). Unfortunately, many forces in our society ad in our schools promote dis-belonging and “belonging uncertainty” rooted in academic ability; cultural beliefs and practices; race, sexuality, gender identity, or class; immigration status; and other factors (Christensen, 2009; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Too many schools act as if belonging is a reward for achievement and good behavior, rather than a precondition (Kunc, 1992).

Belonging can be understood as beginning, in part, from within — a process of developing one’s identity and seeing a bit of oneself in others (May, 2011). Educators can start by interrogating their own understanding of belonging in the school and other spaces. To what communities, identities, or spaces do you belong? What makes you feel you belong, or don’t belong, somewhere? Do you see yourself in your colleagues, students, and their families? Do you feel you have the right, and ability, to participate in decisions and processes at the school? Whatever the answers to these questions, it can be instructive. A sense of dis-belonging can signal problems and spur change (May, 2011). Also, introspection about one’s own biases can help teachers to resist giving deferential treatment to students based on unconscious biases, a well-documented source of disbelonging for students (Ostermann, 2000). When belonging is present, safety is created, allowing for students to bring their whole selves to school.

Relationships with adults and peers in the school are central to a strong sense of belonging for students. Educators can foster belonging by building trusting relationships with students and creating environments where students can build such relationships among themselves, for example through cooperative learning and dialogue (Brown, 2018; Ostermann, 2000). Educators can also promote belonging by supporting students in developing strong identities and sense of belonging to larger communities, such as those rooted in racial and ethnic identity (Berkel et al., 2010; Seaton et al., 2011). Educators must be able to notice and address instances of interpersonal discrimination (Hamm et al., 2005), and sensitize themselves to the ways that classroom environments can communicate (dis)belonging in the absence of explicit discrimination, for example due to preferential treatment, ability sorting, or materi-

als in which the cultural backgrounds of students are not represented. Practices that address these issues include including community circles and other structures that offer equal time for all to talk, inclusive practices that integrate students of differing abilities into the same activities, and bringing examples, speakers, and materials from the families and lives of students (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Gonzalez, Moll, & Ananti, 2006).

Healing schools must build belonging into their structures, policies, and norms. Reliance on traditional community building activities like sports, pep rallies, and science fairs can sometimes ignore the diversity of the school and communicate that belonging comes through assimilation. Healing schools need to promote belonging based on a pluralistic framework in which community is built through a multiplicity of school identities, access points, and opportunities to participate (Rosaldo, 1994). Meanwhile, harsh disciplinary policies can communicate that students are disposable and always at risk of being excluded. Alternative disciplinary policies are needed that are designed around inclusion rather than exclusion, that privilege relationships over punishment, and that are understood by students as fair (Ma, 2003; Morrison, 2006). Other policies and systems that promote the right to belong include inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities and English emergent students (Theoharis & Brooks, 2012); detracking (Ostermann, 2000); dual language instruction (Torres-Guzmán, 2007); giving students real responsibilities in school (Ellis et al., 2016); and hiring educators who represent the diversity of the school and themselves feel they belong (Gershenson et al., 2017).

For students to truly feel they belong at a school, that belonging must extend to families and the broader communities of which they are a part. Creating welcoming environments inside schools, honoring families' cultures and assets, fostering authentic school decision making by families, and engaging family members as partners all help to extend belonging to the wider school community. In addition, having school staff leave school walls to engage in the broader community (home visits, attending sports events, etc.) helps to foster a reciprocal connection and demonstrate that the school belongs in the community as well (Dantas & Manyak, 2011). Finally, schools must be attentive to the larger structures of belonging and dis-belonging in society that impact students, often in harmful and traumatic ways. Engaging students in learning about and confronting oppressions in school and community through critical pedagogies and real-world learning can build resilience among students, contribute to improving conditions, and build a sense of their right to belong, without assimilating or changing who they are (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1972; Ginwright, 2016).

Agency

Finally, healing schools create conditions for all to experience a sense of agency. By agency, we mean “the capacity to act in the world as intentional, meaning-making beings, whose actions are shaped and constrained, but never fully determined by life circumstances” (Finn, 2016, p. 38). When individuals experience agency, they feel empowered to create, change, and transform the world around them — to be “contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them” (Bandura, 2006,

p. 164). A feeling of agency has been shown to promote engagement, motivation, self-worth, sense of belonging, and hope among students and educators. When needs for agency are not met, feelings of powerlessness are associated with disengagement, anger, depression, and hopelessness (Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Ginwright, 2016; Toshalis Nakkula, 2012). There is a growing body of literature that critiques the urban education system for limiting student agency and viewing it negatively in terms of resistance (Fine & Ruglis, 2009).

Educators can begin with an understanding of their own power and agency, as well as how that agency is impacted by the systems of power around them; where they feel empowered or powerless (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). School systems can be constraining spaces for educators, particularly given recent trends in increased control and accountability. However, despite their hierarchical structure, leadership in urban schools is highly distributed across actors and actions and there are many large and small ways for individual educators to take on leadership roles in the urban education of students and the improvement of schools (Harris & Muijis, 2004). While not individually empowered to make school-wide decisions, educators have access to relational “power with” others in the school and can tap into their personal agency through collective engagement (Vaandering, 2013).

Educators can support student agency in their schools, communities, and society at large. At its most basic, supporting student agency is about providing students with choice: supporting students in defining their educational goals, problem-solving solutions to challenges they face, and having ownership over decisions impacting their future. It is also about giving students authentic choice in how classrooms are run, and how they want to be in community, for example having students involved in deciding what to do when norms are broken and how the classroom community can be restored. When students experience this kind of power, control, and authority in their learning, a sense agency is fostered and meaningful student involvement in the school community is encouraged (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). As students grow and expand their understanding of the world, teachers can support students in critiquing their schools and communities, imagining new possibilities, and taking action on things they care about, through processes such as critical pedagogy and participatory action research (Cammarotta & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Moll, 2019).

At the school level, agency is advanced through structures and practices of shared leadership and student voice. Shared leadership among adults in the school can take many forms — teacher teams, shared governance, action research teams, etc. — but at heart is about sharing power and building the capacity of all to work together to foster change. This allows the school to leverage the diversity of its staff to bring multiple perspectives, knowledge sources, and approaches to bear (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). The inclusion of students in school leadership and decision making is equally important as a way of centering student experiences, perspectives, needs, and dreams in school change, and as a way of supporting civic engagement and resilience. Student voice efforts run the gamut, from efforts to listen to students prior to decision making, to forms of student-adult collaboration, to student-led efforts at school change (Mitra, 2008). While formal structures such as student councils are the most recognized forms of student voice, work in RJ and youth organizing have

opened up different structures of student leadership that can engage more students in authentic ways (Mitra, 2008; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Finally, healing schools invest in engagement efforts that situate families as leaders and decision makers in our schools (Warren et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2018). Families have a wealth of knowledge, skills, and assets to bring to the work of improving schools, which is unleashed when parents are able to access power and collaborate equitably with educators (Warren & Mapp, 2011). In our low-wealth communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities, such efforts must overcome a range of barriers including cultural differences, biases, broken trust, and a lack of opportunities to build the capacity to collaborate effectively (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Again, students can be central to this work, through intergenerational efforts to critique and transform our schools and communities.

Enacting the Framework: Critical Reflection

The ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) proposed here situates relationships, safety, belonging, and agency at the heart of a healing school. We have explicitly stayed away from proposing specifications for reform or a set of prescribed programs or practices for healing schools, though we mentioned some of the many possibilities. Healing schools will necessarily look very different based on their specific contexts, communities, and histories allowing for system fit to be at the core of school reform (Gherardi et al., 2020). Instead, we propose an approach to implementation based on the adoption of, and collective action/reflection in pursuit of, key values. A full explication of how values-based implementation of this framework can be carried out is beyond the scope of this article, and will be the topic of future research. However, we do need to mention one indispensable aspect of this implementation: critical reflection.

Enacting this framework must begin with educators engaging in critical reflection around the four values. By critical reflection, we mean a “structured, analytical, and emotional process that helps us examine the ways in which we make meaning of circumstances, events, and situations” (Finn, 2016, p. 363). Critical reflection needs to involve an investigation of our own values, experiences, and assumptions, as well as the spiritual, social, and political forces that shape our decisions (Ginwright, 2016). In essence, critical reflection encourages us to question taken-for-granted assumptions of how things ought to be — what is normal — and opens up new possibilities for thought and action (Freire, 1972). While this deep reflection may be uncomfortable and lead to the need to unlearn some learned behaviors and responses (Hendry, 2009), this awareness can build the capacity to change in educators and support the creation of a healing school.

We offer critical questioning as a key tool to scaffold this work (Finn, 2016). Reflection through questioning serves as a metacognitive mechanism (Karpov & Haywood, 1998) that educators can use to articulate principles of practice and a vision for a healing school. Hendry (2009) promotes the use of open questions to develop self-awareness which is “your ability to monitor and evaluate your own attitudes and behaviors, and your awareness of the impact that these have on others” (p. 113). Further, questioning can allow us to develop a deeper understanding of our

interactions with others, the political and historical dimensions of urban education, and our role in the reproduction of power differentials — all necessary explorations providing us with the means to act upon our reflections (Evans & Vaandering, 2016; Hoffman-Kipp et al., 2003).

As a scaffold for beginning this process, we present the healing schools framework in the chart below as a set of interlocking questions. These questions are not comprehensive, but point to the key areas of work for educators, as well as topics for future research. While many of these questions on their own have been the subject of significant scholarship and action, we argue that it is only when asked together that they can lead to a coherent and holistic approach to transforming schools.

Future Directions

This is an integrative model that we are proposing. Further study is needed to understand the perspectives of all school partners (teachers, school administrators, students, families, and communities) and ways in which the values could be incorporated. This understanding would allow for those providing professional development to better address needs of the school and to weave the concepts together into an integrated whole-school model based on relationship-supportive values that foster healing and justice. Additionally, we recognize that these interdisciplinary perspectives from social work, psychology, and education are derived from the work we have done alongside urban schools and would benefit from the integrated voice of teachers, staff, administrators, students, parents, and community stakeholders as we begin to implement these values.

At the end of each day, we urge adults, parents, and communities in schools to reflect on your experiences and encounters. See what each has to teach you about the culture of your school. Then consider as a whole school how this understanding relates to creating a healing school. By engaging in critical reflection you are accepting responsibility for your part in creating a healing school. By doing this work of understanding and building schools around the values of relationship, safety, belonging, and agency, you begin to close the gaps between you, your assumptions, your needs and those of those around you, and your actions—it can give you a much more complete understanding of “what is” and lead to informed decisions and actions that heal.

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Declarations

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