ADVERSITY & WHOLE-SCHOOL WELL-BEING: A CRITICAL RACE ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING POLICY

CGHE Building Blocks of Equity Seminar Series

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Agenda & Objectives

1. Building Blocks of Equity-Oriented & Co-Produced Knowledge

2. Researcher Identity

3. Study

4. Successful Partnerships

5. Questions & Discussion

Equity-Oriented & Co-Produced Knowledge

Photo: University at Buffalo, Community of Excellence in Global Health Equity

Website: http://www.buffalo.edu/globalhealthequity.html

Series Questions:

1. How do researchers – at all stages of their careers – form effective partnerships?

2. How do researchers & respective partners engage in co-produced knowledge?

3. How do researchers critically & ethically engage within Global South communities?

4. How can researchers & student scholars contribute to building societal equity?

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Equity-Oriented & Co-Produced Knowledge in Our Study

- Centers criticality & race;

- Centers community-driven equity concerns;

- Centers positionality & reciprocal relationships;

- Centers change in research, policy, & practice through collaborative engagement.

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Researcher Identity

Graphic: Weingarten Learning Resources Center

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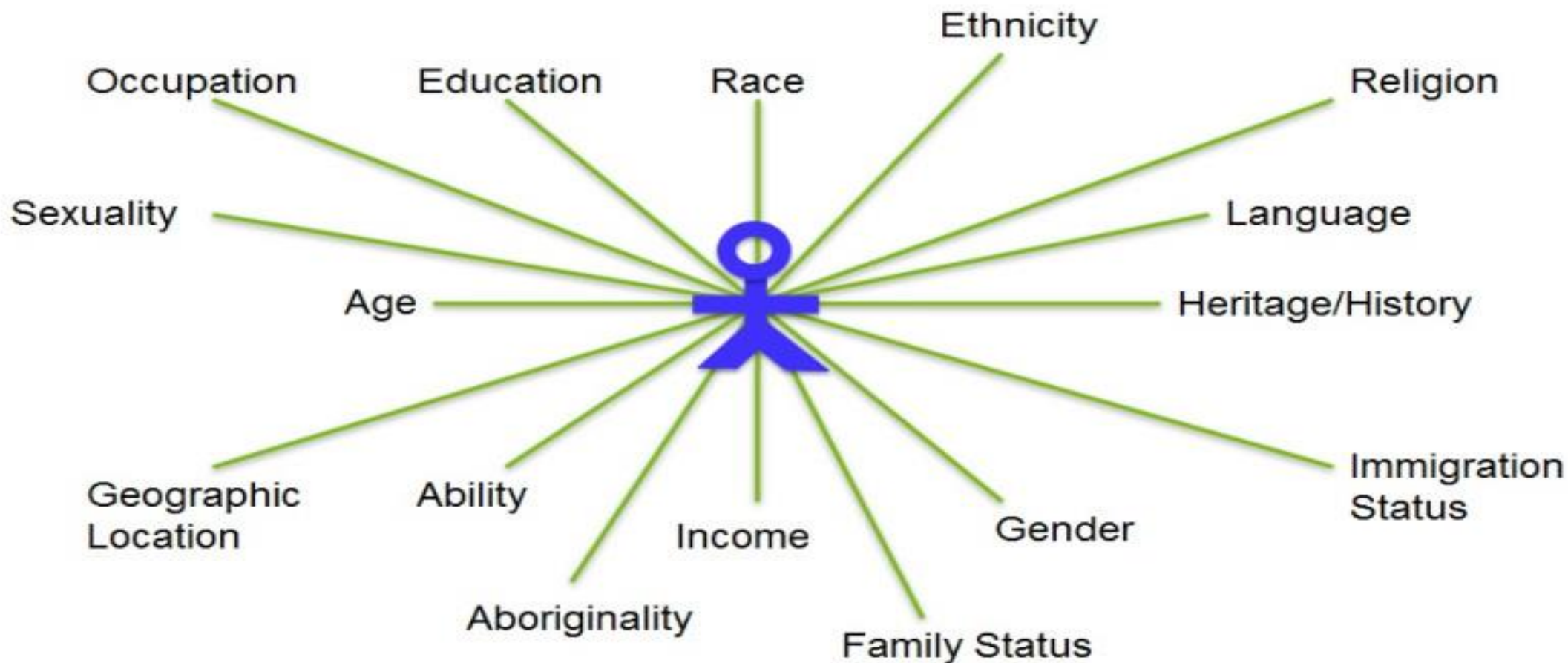
Research Problem

- Social emotional learning (SEL) programs aim to promote student well-being & healthy relationships – *goals underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic & global protests over racial violence & injus*tice;

- Educators are on the frontlines of trauma intervention, & SEL & culturally & linguistically trauma-informed policies increasingly common in schools;

- Yet, policy existence doesn't necessarily operationalize into appropriate practice to address trauma (individual & collective), & societal factors that create & perpetuate it (Lemke, et al., 2020; Lemke et al., 2021);

- Concern with initiatives amounting to "palliative care" for critical social issues, simultaneously overburdening educators tasked with implementation;

- Potential to increase burnout & compassion fatigue, & not address issues like secondary trauma.

Research Purpose

1. Analyze how NYS educational guidelines designed to increase student SEL can, if at all, achieve the goal of "being well" for educational leaders & systems;

2. Analyze how race & racism are – or are not – addressed within the guidelines, the implications of their inclusion/exclusion, & offer recommendations for policy & practice where student SEL & educator well-being is concerned specifically within urban contexts;

3. Fulfill the CRT call to demonstrate "what is distinct about a CRT policy analysis" (Bradbury, 2020, p. 242) & "expose racism in education & propose radical solutions for addressing it" (Ladson-Billings, 2016, p. 28).

Literature & Theoretical Framework

Four Focal Points Grounded Literature Review:

1. Student adversity (i.e. "trauma"), particularly among Black & other minoritized students (Alvarez, 2020);

2. Concerns with educational accountability reform within urban educational contexts, & student adversity & leader stress within such environments;

3. Existent approaches to SEL & limitations/critiques of such approaches;

4. CRT in educational research & educational policy analysis.

Critical Race Theory:

1. Used to examine colorblindness, white dominance, & supremacy within existing policy/practices & shape future policy directives (Buras, 2013; Gillborn, 2013);

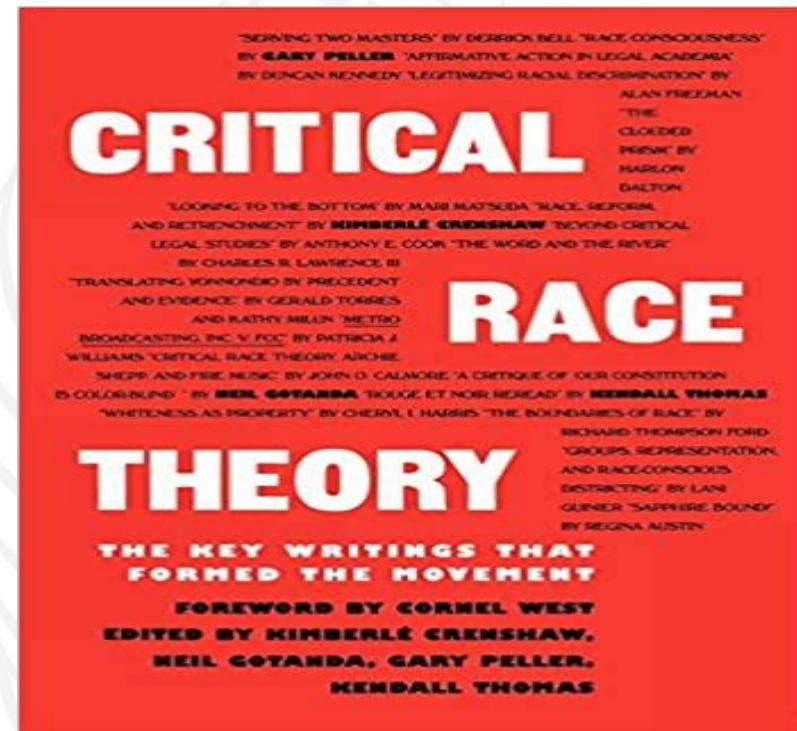2. Used Bradbury's (2020) framework that examined U.K. language policy.

Photo: Columbia Law School Scholarship Archive

Table 1. A CRT framework for policy analysis.

	Context of influence	Context of text production	Context of practice
• How do white people gain? • How does this damage or disadvantage minoritised groups or individuals? • How does this disadvantage one group more than another? What is the purpose of this? • How is white dominance prioritised? • How does this maintain/continue/reinforce white dominance?	• How is this policy influenced by circulating discourses around race as a priority/not a priority (or a distraction)? • How is the 'policy problem' established in the policy creation community, and how does this relate to 'race'? • How does this policy present those in power as caring about racial equity (even where this is not the result)? • Is the creation of the policy problem a distraction from matters of racial equity? • What and who are missing in this context? What the effect of this absence?	• How does policy constitute groups or individuals – as problems or part of solutions? • Is this policy useful to either those who seek to challenge racial inequity, or those who seek to ignore it? • If a policy is presented as 'colorblind' or race neutral, how does this delegitimise those who challenge policy on the grounds of equity? • How does the policy and reaction to it maintain or establish new regimes of truth which reinforce the dominance of whiteness?	• What is the impact of the policy on pedagogy and practice? • How does the policy produce practices that result in disparities in attainment through seemingly neutral practices? • How does the policy encourage the use of stereotypes, dividing practices or labelling, in ways which disadvantaged minoritised students? • How does the absence or presence of 'race' perpetuate inequalities?

Source: Bradbury, A. (2020). A critical race theory framework for education policy analysis: The case of bilingual learners and assessment policy in England. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 23*(2), 241-260. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1599338

Data Collection & Analysis

Data Source:

1. New York State Education Department (NYSED. (2019). *Social emotional learning guide to systematic whole school implementation*. http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sss/documents/GuideToSystemicWholeSchoolImplementationFINAL.pdf

Analysis:

1. Selection & application of Bradbury framework's (2020) primary & sub-questions;
2. Phase 1: Individual read of the NYSED guidelines, with analytic memo writing & completion of CRT framework-aligned template;
3. Phase 2: Paused analysis to discuss readings & compare thinking about policy text;
4. Phase 3: Reread of the text in light of the other researcher's thinking & to check for inconsistent findings.

How Policy Maintains White Dominance & Leader Stress	How the Policy Problem Is Established & Relates to Race	Race Neutrality & Delegitimizing Those Who Challenge Colorblind Policies	Present Absence of Race
Minimal & inconsequential focus on student, leader, & community well-being (e.g., *inclusion, race, diversity, & trauma* had 2, 4, 4, 12 respective mentions); Centered white values (e.g, students "act in accordance with social norms" (NYSED, 2019, p. 8); Racism & structural causes of student adversity / trauma not included, thus fails to support, "mindset change necessary for effective SEL implementation" (NYSED, 2019, p. 35).	Ambiguous terminology & absence of "terms and concepts of relevance" precludes meaningful consideration of student needs relative to SEL; Students of color discussed via deficit framing, as a problem to be fixed (e.g., "unique" & "at-risk" populations to serve on SEL implementation teams).	Doesn't explicitly consider racism & other forms of structural inequality, complicating ability of students to demonstrate, "ethical decision-making skills & responsible behaviors in personal, school, & community contexts" & "self-efficacy" (NYSED, 2019, p. 15); Assumes educators have current training, a critical orientation toward race issues, & are bias free, which renders guidelines ineffective for facilitating school equity practices, & renders it potentially unusable (& unethical).	Overall approach was "student-focused" (NYSED, 2019, p. 40) & thus in focusing on student behavior as opposed to looking at structural factors maintains & promotes white values & dominance; "Approach to Discipline" (NYSED, 2019), the longest section with no discussion of race & contextual factors limited or tied to classroom; stymied SEL-based competencies that might disrupt disproportionate rates of discipline for students of color.

Limitations, Significance, & Recommendations

- Did not conduct field research, nor interviews of NYSED members who wrote guidelines – *our goal was to analyze outcome, not intent* (see Gillborn, 2016);

- *Applicable* to policy initiatives in similarly situated state & local contexts;

- *Applicable* to current & highly visible attention paid to & debates concerning the intersections between trauma, racial conflict, & critical perspectives in public education;

- *Builds* on bodies of equity-oriented SEL & CRT-based educational policy analysis;

- *Builds* on practices that aim to disrupt structural inequality in U.S. schools, rather than provide "palliative care;"

- **Recommendations:** *Promote* whole-school well-being, *address* school leader stress (to decrease "burnout" / increase retention, amid ongoing teacher shortage), & *interrogate* disproportionalities that result, in part, from racial discrimination, bias, & inequitable policy mandates.

Successful Partnerships:
Aspects of Co-Constructed & Transdisciplinary Research

Photo: Susan Yin via Unsplash

1. **Critical:** Grounded in need to address intersections of student adversity, racial inequity, educational policy, & leadership practice

2. **Academic & Professional:** Rich backdrop for collaboration in writing, "Student Adversity & Leader Stress"

3. **Collaborative:** Mentor/mentee relationship, communication, division of labor, various writing processes, & output expectations

4. **Transformative:** Aim is for research to have real-world applicability with NYSED &/or local school district (BPS)

Take-Aways

Graphic: University at Buffalo, Community of Excellence in Global Health Equity
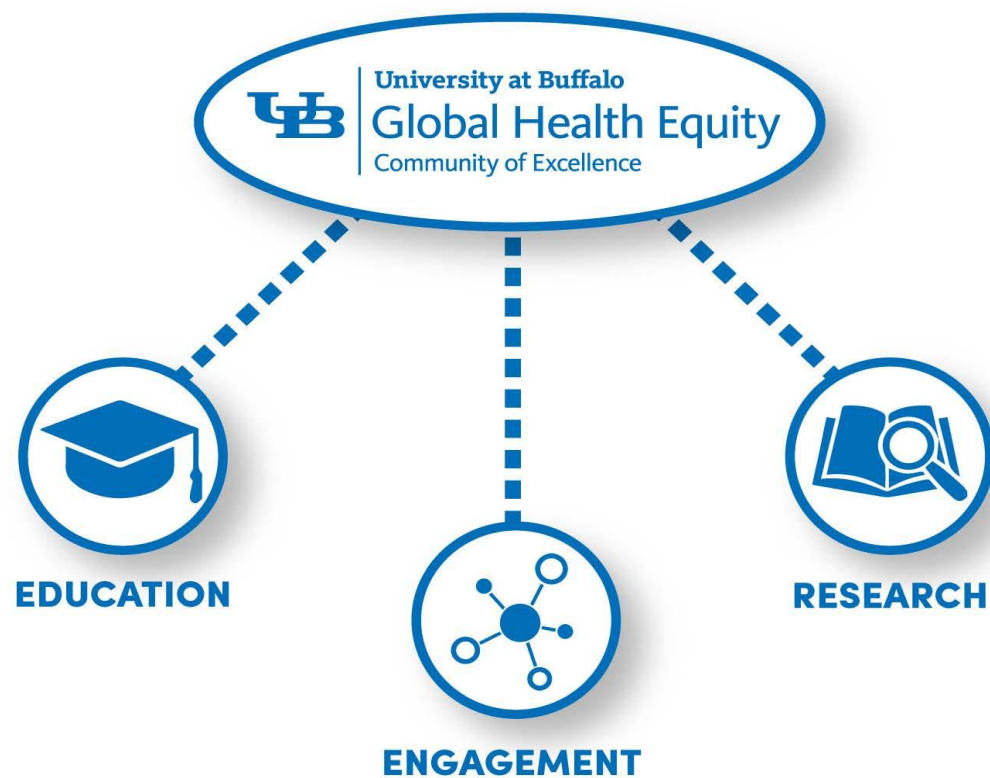
Publication (forthcoming)

Lemke, M. & White, A. (In press, expected spring 2022). Student adversity and leader stress: A critical race contextualization and analysis of state social emotional learning policy. In B. W. Carpenter, J. Mahfouz, & K. Washington (Eds.), *Supporting leaders for school improvement through self-care and well-being* (pp. TBD). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
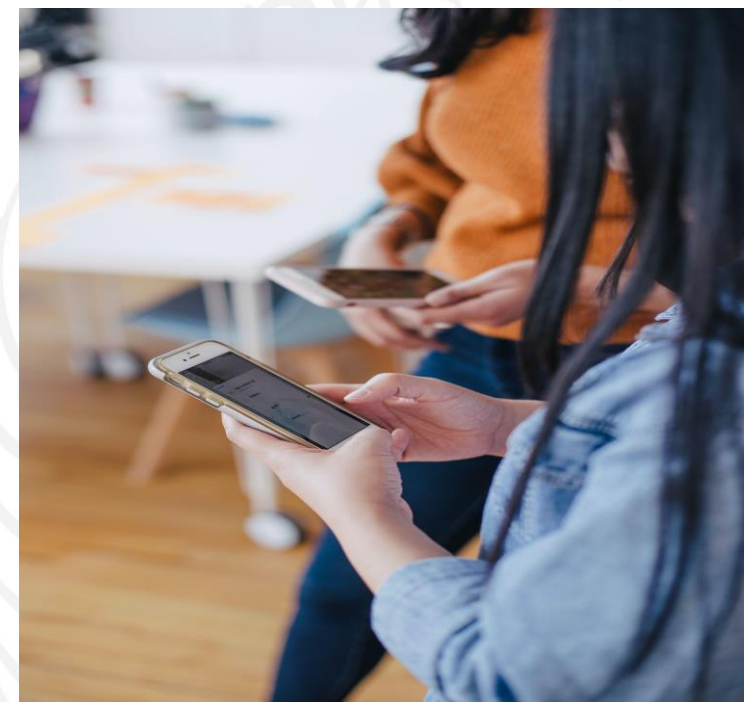

Photo: Nick Morrison via Unsplash

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Questions & Discussion

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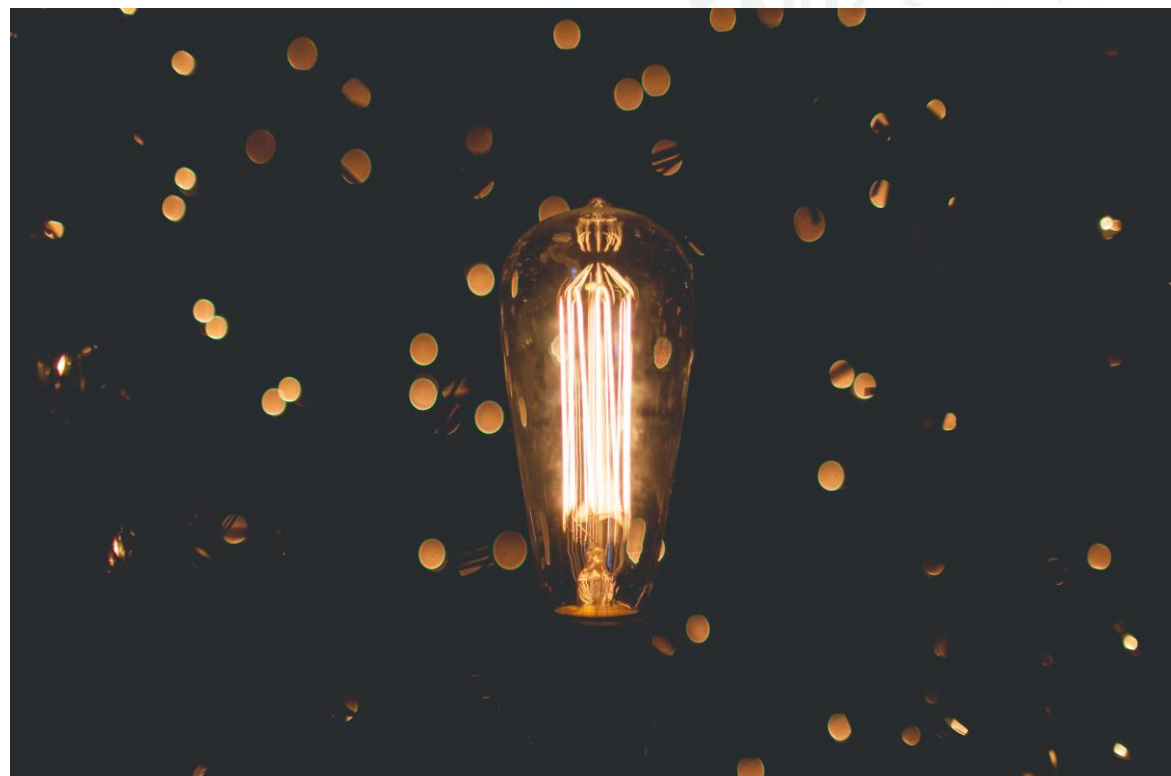malemke@buffalo.edu

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