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"You Can't Talk About the Whole Child Without the Whole Teacher": How Two Districts Support Whole Teacher Development in the United States and Canada

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This article examines the inextricable link between student and teacher well-being through district-level conditions and systems of whole teacher development in support of whole child education. Through a qualitative dual-case study of two large urban school districts in Canada and the United States, this article defines the concept of 'whole teacher' and identifies four sets of conditions and systems for whole teacher development. Findings lift up the need to fundamentally redesign the work environment for teachers to parallel the school climate teachers build for students, emphasizing the role of relationships, nurturing teacher growth and development, and building meaningful collaborative cultures of trust and innovation within school sites and across districts. Implications suggest ways in which school districts can redesign systems of teacher support in service of equitable whole child education, including developing a shared understanding and commitment to whole teacher development while simultaneously nurturing conditions and systems to bolster teacher well-being.

Keywords: Whole child education, whole teacher development, teacher well-being

Making changes in individuals when the system is part of the problem leaves basic structures intact and is unlikely to affect the problem…Therefore, policymakers should consider making changes for teachers rather than in teachers. (Berryhill et al., 2009, p.9)

Introduction

Teacher well-being is vital for student success (Cross & Falconer, 2021; Lane et al., 2023; Roffey, 2012; Turner & Theilking, 2019). In addition to facilitating skill development and knowledge acquisition, teachers play a critical role in building positive classroom environments and fostering strong relationships with students, which in turn support students' social, emotional, and academic growth (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Dailey et al., 2019; Kwong & Davis, 2015; Villaseñor, 2017). Yet, school staff tend to emphasize student experiences and climate above their own, demonstrating their steadfast commitment to students while missing the interconnectedness of student and teacher well-being (Capp et al., 2021). There is ample research on the conditions and systems of whole child education approaches that

tend to holistic student well-being in the aims of equitable deeper learning experiences (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Cook - Harvey, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2021; Yoder, 2014). However, there is limited research that uplifts systems of whole teacher development (Adams et al., 2020) Chen & McCray, 2012; Colvin, 2017; Shin, 2012).

This study builds on Mehta and Fine's (2019) notion of *symmetry,* which explains that in order for schools to "close the gap between espoused values and enacted practices" with deeper and more equitable learning, schools need "a carefully crafted organizational design that enables them to realize it" (p. 41). *Symmetry* posits that the way schools support adults should mirror how adults are expected to support students. Just as teachers work to build culturally inclusive learning environments and promote positive development for students of all backgrounds, schools and districts can work to minimize burnout and attrition and increase retention and job satisfaction through strategic organizational shifts. The dismal state of teacher well-being, particularly in the United States (Doan et al., 2024; Steiner et al., 2022), calls for structural solutions to redesign aspects of the teaching profession in alignment with the culturally affirming, transformative, personalized, and empowering ethos embedded in whole child education approaches to deeper learning (Learning Policy Institute, 2021). This article contributes to the field by exploring the inextricable link between student and teacher well-being and identifying district-level conditions and systems of whole teacher development in support of whole child education.

Literature Review

Situating Teacher Well-being Frameworks

The World Health Organization (WHO) positioned the importance of well-being in 1946 by defining health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. This foundational conceptualization of well-being highlights both its multidimensional nature and the need to examine the positive aspects of well-being as opposed to a sole focus on ill-being. Since the WHO wrote well-being into their organization's constitution, waves of researchers have posited their own multidimensional definitions. Diener (1984) explored subjective well-being, defining it by three key components of happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect. Ryff (1989) built upon this multidimensional approach and included self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth in her definition of psychological well-being. Such conceptualizations led to multidimensional definitions of well-being situated within organizational psychology as well, carrying over the importance of elements like autonomy, competence with work tasks (Warr, 1994), and happiness, engagement, and satisfaction with work (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011).

Teacher well-being frameworks parallel the multidimensional definitions posited within broader employee well-being literature and incorporate many of the same elements, albeit localized within the schooling context (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Teacher well-being frameworks emphasize well-being as the inverse of such ill-being elements as teacher stress and stress-management, burnout, depression, and job-related anxiety (Brincheno et al., 2009; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014; Naghieh et al., 2015). There appears to be less consensus on what defines the positive aspects of well-being, but comprehensive reviews uplift concepts including individual flourishing, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and mental health (Acton & Glasgow, 2015;

Cumming, 2017). Viac and Fraser (2020) outline four broad components of positive teacher well-being as a form of occupational well-being that mirror the WHO's foundational definition: physical and mental well-being, cognitive well-being, subjective well-being, and social well-being. Notably, Viac and Fraser identify connections between these core components and teachers' inward outcomes with stress and retention as well as external outcomes of teaching quality and student well-being, as explored through student achievement, motivation and attitude towards learning, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being (2020). Gray et al. (2017) similarly explore the importance of teacher well-being a step beyond the experience of the individual teacher and highlight the relationship between student outcomes, school climate, and teacher well-being. In fact, there is mounting research that draws links between student well-being and teacher well-being, noting the centrality of student-teacher relationships and environments that promote belonging, respect, value, and trust for students and teachers alike (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Harding et al., 2019; Roffey, 2012; Spilt et al., 2011).

The State of Teacher Well-being

Literature through the 2020's paints a grim portrait of the teaching profession worldwide (Agyapong et al., 2022; Steiner et al., 2022). A study conducted by RAND highlights that stress and burnout are now primary drivers of teacher attrition, outpacing even salary concerns (Doan et al., 2024). Findings from the State of the American Teacher Survey, administered in 2022 (Doan et al., 2024) demonstrate that teachers experience frequent job-related stress at a rate of 73% as compared to 35% of other working adults. Similarly, 59% of teachers reported experiences of burnout as compared with 44% of all working adults and 28% noted feelings of depression as compared to 17% of their non-teaching peers. Teachers further reported a 46% resilience rate in their work setting as compared to 80% of all working adults. Demographic disparities are pronounced: Black and female teachers report higher rates of burnout and a greater intent to leave the profession, driven by both heightened stress and persistent inequities in pay and support (Doan et al., 2024; Learning Policy Institute, 2024). In addition, teachers working in high-poverty schools report lower overall well-being and greater turnover intentions than their peers in wealthier schools (Doan et al., 2024; Learning Policy Institute, 2024). Across elements of well-being and ill-being, teachers fared far worse than their non-teaching peers in the workplace, pointing to the urgent need for continued research on teacher well-being to promote appropriate interventions (Chen & Chi-kin Lee, 2024).

While promoting individual well-being strategies like mindfulness and self-care are insufficient when implemented on their own (McCallum et al., 2017), there is evidence that combining targeted individual well-being interventions with structural shifts to teaching conditions can positively impact teacher well-being – including promoting retention (Naghieh et al., 2015). Viac and Fraser (2020) uplift the critical importance of both macro- and micro-system-level factors in impacting teacher well-being by building on the Job Quality Framework. The Job Quality Framework (Cazes et al., 2015) outlines how the policy settings of educational systems (material conditions, quality standards, distribution and allocation of resources, and career structure) impact the quality of the teaching environment through a balance of job demands (e.g., work load, physical learning environments, disciplinary climate) and job resources (e.g., work autonomy, social support), ultimately impacting teachers' occupational well-being. At the school site level, supportive environments that foster positive adult relationships and opportunities for active teacher involvement in school and district decision-making are shown to be key sources of job satisfaction and retention (Osher, 2024; Steiner et al.,

2022; Walker, 2022). Similarly, teachers who feel respected as professionals and trusted to make decisions in the best interest of their students are more likely to continuously adapt within their work environments and persist in the classroom (Bartlett et al., 2024). Promoting positive teacher self-efficacy through a systematic focus on authenticity, autonomy, and resilience can foster teacher well-being, as can participation in meaningful collaborative professional learning communities that promote engagement and empowerment (Cross & Falconer, 2021; McCallum et al., 2017). Further, school systems can build 'collaborative professionalism' through coaching structures and meeting protocols that foster trusting relationships amongst teachers and staff and nurture an environment where it is safe to take risks and make mistakes with their work (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Research indicates that just as the definition of teacher well-being is multidimensional, so too are the approaches to improving it.

Whole Teacher Development for Whole Child Education

In parallel with the embedded subject of teacher well-being as contextualized within an occupation, whole child education refers to the 'whole student' - a learner contextualized within the educational system and broader societal ecosystem. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2007) explains a successfully supported learner as "one who is knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically inspired, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling", p.4). The Science of Learning and Development offers a framework of five key structures and practices for supporting these whole child outcomes: (1) positive developmental relationships, (2) environments filled with safety and belonging, (3) rich learning experiences and knowledge development, (4) integrated support systems, and (5) development of skills, habits and mindsets that contribute to the goal of healthy student development, learning, and thriving (Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children, 2021). Some of the same conditions that are shown to promote teacher well-being are also linked with student success. Studies demonstrate the connections between whole child approaches and academic achievement, linking elements such as relationship-rich learning environments and a focus on deeper learning skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity) with students' capacity to gain command of curriculum (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; García, 2014; García & Weiss, 2016; Mehta & Fine, 2019). Such research points to the symmetry between whole teacher development and whole child education.

In this study, 'whole teacher development' is explored as the conditions and systems of comprehensively supporting teachers' occupational well-being, with an emphasis on building strong job resources (Cazes et al., 2015) aligned with whole child education priorities. Teacher well-being research emphasizes the role of relational environments and collaboration in informing and influencing teacher professional capacity. For example, Collie et al. (2012) found that cultural conditions such as shared values and positive and supportive relations with colleagues and school leadership were positively associated with collective efficacy and belonging. Additional research has shown that teacher confidence in their ability to manage student behaviors, as part of a supportive professional working environment, is a consistent and robust predictor of teacher well-being outcomes (Herman et al., 2021).

The literature on teacher well-being points to the indelible link between how teachers learn and their role as leaders from the classroom. Recent research on effective professional learning demonstrates the importance of "protect(ing) time for teachers to collaborate around broader learning goals" with "clear mechanisms and structures for *creating social accountability*

for the necessary shifts" in teaching practices (Alicea et al., 2024, p.8). Teacher learning and leadership are tightly aligned; both are about *peer influence* and are rarely "vested in one person who is high up in the hierarchy" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 262). Further, the mobilization of knowledge across a system or organization - knowledge brokering - is an inherently social task, especially in the context of teaching, leading, and learning (Rodway, et. al., 2024). Intentionally built collaborative structures with an emphasis on collaborative leadership, such as within the community schooling approach to whole child education (Maier et al., 2017), can support whole teacher development.

Conditions for Systems of Whole Teacher Development

The multidimensional nature of both teacher well-being and whole child development indicates the need for a comprehensive systems-level approach to building adult capacity that extends across the educator career pipeline. Mitchell and Sickney (2009) elucidate upon this concept by explaining how long-term systemic educational improvement is a reciprocal process between developing teachers as learners and schools as learning organizations, building on Senge's (1990) seminal work on learning organizations, defined by personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking. Learning Policy Institute (2022) offers a five-pronged approach to supporting whole teachers to, in turn, support whole child development and thriving in the school setting: (1) design teacher preparation programs to support whole child developmental needs, (2) adopt aligned teacher recruitment and retentions strategies, (3) support high-quality mentoring and induction programs for early-career teachers, (4) implement in-service professional development connected with process-oriented teacher evaluations, and (5) support teacher well-being by creating positive work environments and adopting practices to decrease stress and burnout. Mchenry and Kelly (2023) outline possibilities for whole teacher preparation programs, suggesting an emphasis on empathy building alongside other socioemotional skills, and development of assets-based perspectives aligned with cultural responsiveness. This approach builds upon Shin's (2012) argument that notions of professionalism within teacher preparation programs need to move beyond knowledge and skill development to include dispositions and attitudes of teaching. Chen and McCray (2012) propose whole teacher in-service professional development programs that similarly focus on developing teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and practice as opposed to a narrow focus on knowledge and skill acquisition. Durrant (2019) emphasizes the importance of teacher agency as a disposition within professional development spaces as a mechanism for school improvement.

This article builds on the connections between whole child and whole teacher well-being, focusing on the role of school districts in designing and implementing systems to support in-service whole teacher development. Too often, research points to promoting individual coping mechanisms of ill-being such as building educator resilience and self-care (Brady & Wilson, 2019; Hester, 2020) or deepening educator socioemotional learning skills (Colvin, 2017). While these techniques are important to teacher well-being, they are insufficient when implemented in isolation, as demonstrated by the grim state of teacher well-being, evidenced by high rates of stress, burnout, attrition, and lack of resilience and job satisfaction (Agyapong et al., 2022; Doan et al., 2024; Learning Policy Institute, 2024; Steiner et al., 2022). This article builds on research that emphasizes the role of organizational systems and practices that foster teacher well-being (Adams et al., 2020; Bricheno et al., 2009; Osher, 2024; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Through a qualitative dual-case study of two large urban school districts, we elucidate the concept of 'whole teacher' and identify the inextricable links between the cultural conditions and

organizational systems of whole teacher development. This article adds to the literature by lifting up the need to fundamentally redesign the work environment, with a focus on building strong job resources (Cazes et al., 2015), for teachers to parallel the school climate teachers build for students. Findings emphasize the role of relationships, nurturing teacher professional growth and development, and building meaningful collaborative cultures of trust and innovation within school sites and across districts.

Methods and Research Questions

Research Design

Our data for this article comes from a broader dual-case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of two large urban school districts in Southern California and British Columbia, Canada. The research design adapted elements from the Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) approach, which is intended to bring together a wide range of expertise and leverage strategies to "shift power relations in research endeavors to ensure that all participants have a say" (Farrell et al., 2021, p. iv). Our approach leveraged the close and ongoing collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and international experts (UCLA Center for Community Schooling, 2022) to refine research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis and writing. The collaborative case study serves as an example of an approach to a research paradigm that aims to authentically honor the work and needs of education practitioners.

In selecting districts for the exploratory dual-case study, we sought partner sites that would enable our examination of district-level practices and systems supporting teacher leadership for whole child education, with an emphasis on secondary education. Such an emphasis helps expand on the literature that explores the role of organizational systems in nurturing teacher well-being (Adams et al., 2020; Bricheno et al., 2009; Osher, 2024).The two school districts selected demonstrated progress with deeper student-led learning (Mehta & Fine, 2019). The broader policy contexts of British Columbia's recently implemented graduation requirements that encourage students to expand their understanding of Indigenous perspectives, histories, and cultures and California's momentous investment in community schooling (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2024; California Department of Education, 2022; Fensterwald & Xie, 2022) created a rich policy foundation to explore emerging innovations and best practices in systems level whole child education approaches.

Our full corpus of information includes interviews and focus groups with district and school site administrators, interviews and focus groups with educators, participant observation through learning exchanges and professional development opportunities, meeting minutes, field notes, and document analysis. We also enlisted the guidance of two advisory groups - a site-specific teacher advisory group and an international advisory board - to guide our thinking and ensure the voices of participants were accurately understood and portrayed.

Given the focus on whole teacher development in secondary education settings, we analyzed data from eight focus groups conducted with educators, coaches, school site administrators, and district staff and one in-depth interview with a school site administrator for this article (N=40). In analyzing this subset of data, we aimed to examine the ways in which the two districts support whole teacher development in service of whole child education. Our research questions were:

1) How does each district define whole teacher?
2) What district conditions and systems support whole teacher development?

District Site Selection

For the initial site selection, our team sought to identify two secondary school districts - one in California and one in western Canada - that embodied a deep commitment to innovative teacher leadership practices and district-wide approaches to whole child education. Such criteria were emphasized to ensure an exploration of district systems and structures that empower teachers in the aims of supporting students. While we relied on the expertise and knowledge of an international advisory board member to identify the district in British Columbia, we engaged in careful consideration of conversations with philanthropists, union leaders, researchers, and community school advocates to identify two possible California districts. Once the two potential California districts were identified, we conducted a comparative online literature review of all three potential districts to make the final selection. We examined demographics of students and staff, district leadership structures and current staffing, school climate measures, collective bargaining agreements, and evidence of a commitment to deeper learning via programs, partnerships, and practices. These factors were selected to ensure the districts served an appropriately diverse population of students and to confirm an innovative vision and commitment to whole child education at the district level. Once the district in California (henceforth referred to as South District) and the district in British Columbia (henceforth referred to as North District) were identified, initial meetings with district leadership were conducted to ensure interest in study participation.

North District serves over 74,000 K-12 students in 128 schools, including more than 3,200 students of indigenous ancestry (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit). More than 190 languages other than English are represented in the district schools; Punjabi, Tagalog, Mandarin, Hindi, and Arabic are the top five languages spoken. The district's approach to teacher leadership and whole child education is rooted in the Canadian Ministry of Education's Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (Government of British Columbia, 2025), with its focus on numeracy, literacy, graduation, belonging and career and life goals to support all learners. North District has experienced a recent succession of superintendent leadership intended to increase student agency, pointing to the district's focus on building on students' interests through the classroom and broader whole child education approaches. The district has shifted towards student self-assessment and empowered teachers to leverage inquiry-based approaches, including working in interdisciplinary teams to promote academic, social, emotional, and cultural outcomes. North District's commitment to innovative teacher leadership for whole child education is demonstrated by the provision of regular collaborative release time as well as the use of district and school-level coaches who see themselves in close community with their colleagues, supporting their peers' innovations through the practice of collaboration.

South District serves approximately 27,000 students across 21 middle and high schools. Roughly 68% of the district's students (grades 7-12) are Latinx, and 4 out of 5 students qualify for free or reduced price meals, a marker of economic disadvantage. South District has experienced sustained leadership with one superintendent at the helm since 2014. The district has purposefully de-emphasized standardized testing through the elimination of benchmark assessments and has instead shifted classroom assessments to more authentically align with their mission of college, career, and life readiness. South District works to foster technical skills, 21st century/deeper learning skills (collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and compassion), and student voice and purpose, with an emphasis on civic mindedness. Indicative of their commitment to whole child education, South District boasts a comprehensive career and college pathways program; offerings include cybersecurity, biotechnology, medical careers, law

and justice, to name a few. This district employs a partial release coaching model (teach for three periods a day, coach for two periods a day) to build community amongst teachers and coaches and center the expertise in the classroom. Learning Walks, a practice where teachers and parents visit classrooms to observe strong inclusion of deeper learning skills (Fullan & Quinn, 2024; Mehta & Fine, 2019), demonstrates South District's commitment to transparency and innovation. Further, the district has utilized their California Community Schools Partnership Program funding (grant funding predicated primarily on high needs student populations - foster youth, socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, and English language learners) in 15 of their 21 schools to add another partial release coaching position - community school teacher lead. This position is designed to support integration of community-based learning and partnerships with families and the community at large into classrooms, elevating an approach of how to infuse a whole child community schooling ethos into curriculum and pedagogy.

Participants

We had a total of 40 participants in our focus groups and interviews, which were conducted on-site at schools and district offices in April and May of 2022. Participants represent secondary teachers, site-based instructional coaches, principals, vice principals, district administrators, and district-based instructional coaches across the two districts. Instructional coaches in the California district (henceforth referred to as South or South district) are partial release coaches, meaning that they teach three class periods of students each day and coach teachers at their school site for two class periods of the day. Coaches in the British Columbia district (henceforth referred to as North or North district) are district staff and support teachers at multiple school sites across the district. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method, which is used to identify respondents "that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (Kelly, 2010, p. 317). In our case, we identified participants who could share insights into the intersections of teacher leadership and whole child education approaches within their district.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Trustworthiness

As previously noted, data for this article includes the voices of 40 participants from North and South districts across eight role-alike focus groups with educators (three focus groups), coaches (three focus groups), school site administrators (one focus group), and district staff (one focus group) and one interview with a site administrator in the spring of 2022. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed using Otter.ai. In checking transcriptions and conducting an initial round of coding, we agreed thematic saturation was reached in the eight focus groups and one interview.

In order to build our codebook, the first and second author coded one transcript from South District using descriptive and in-vivo coding approaches bounded by the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). We created the initial categories based on concepts, later outlined as codes, that arose from the first transcript analyzed. We continued an iterative coding process, reconciling codes and adjusting subcodes until we had coded each available transcript and reached saturation with content. Throughout the coding process, we both wrote and discussed analytic memos (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2013) to keep track of the evolution of ideas and themes arising. Finally, one researcher coded two additional transcripts while the other researcher coded three additional transcripts. Through the analysis of these remaining five

transcripts, we finalized our codebook and reached 90% inter-coder reliability with categories and codes from a 44% sample of the data (four out of nine transcripts).

We deployed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness of our thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). First, as outlined in detail above, we leveraged an iterative coding process and inter-coder reliability checks to establish aligned coding of the interviews and focus groups (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Additionally, our team brought together two different advisory committees to inform the iterative research design throughout the project and to monitor the validity of data analysis after data was collected and transcribed: an international advisory board and a leading teachers advisory group. The international advisory board included award-winning National Board Certified teacher leaders, academics, superintendents, and policy experts representing the United Kingdom, Finland, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Given the international comparative nature of this dual-case study, international advisory board members were instrumental in providing feedback on contextual considerations in the research design and data analysis phases of the project, leading to trustworthiness of findings. The leading teachers advisory group served to member-check data transcription and analysis (Elo et al., 2014; McKim, 2023), supporting validity of identified themes. The leading teachers advisory group also supported validity by providing feedback on publication drafts, with specific attention to data interpretation. This advisory group consisted of three teacher leaders who also serve as peer coaches in South District, one teacher leader who serves as department head in North District and several district teacher coaches from North District. All of the teacher leaders in the advisory group were participants in our focus groups.

Findings

Our data demonstrated a bidirectional relationship between the whole child approach to education – a foundational aspect of the districts of study – and whole teacher development: comprehensive approaches to supporting teacher well-being, wherein whole teacher development is necessary for the implementation of whole child practices. A coach from South stated, "It (means) starting with us, the teachers. They [the district] are investing a lot of time and energy with us as teachers so that we can invest a lot of time and energy with our students." Such prioritization of teachers underscores the central focus of teacher well-being nested within the work of the whole teacher. Furthermore, another coach from South said, "You can't do whole child if you don't have a whole teacher." Both of these statements suggest comprehensive and robust whole child education hinges on the continued development of a whole teacher. Our findings first aimed to illuminate how the districts defined whole teacher development, with data revealing two primary themes of 1) an emphasis on relationships and a 2) a focus on teacher growth and development. Findings then highlighted the district conditions and systems that created the environment for whole teacher development and whole child education. Conditions included a culture of trust, innovation, and collaboration. Data revealed the systems were coaching and mentorship, shared leadership, and formal and informal collaboration opportunities.

Defining Whole Teacher

Data demonstrated that the concept of the whole teacher was defined by two major components, namely teacher growth and relationships.

A Focus on Teacher Growth & Development

Data unveiled that an essential aspect of supporting a whole teacher was an emphasis on their professional growth. Just as the whole child approach emphasizes the development of the students across multiple domains – academic, social/emotional, identity, and cognitive development (Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children, 2021) – participants explained that the professional growth of teachers was prioritized within the districts of study. A principal from South district discussed the connection between whole child and whole teacher development:

> We've all seen how kids flourish when they're given that platform. When they connect with their peers and their teachers, they feel valued and cared for - they have the right kind of tools to be able to flourish. Well, that's exactly what you're talking about – teachers flourishing…

Notably, educator development was framed as a responsibility of leadership – as a critical part of the leadership role. A principal from South district reflected, "I think it starts with us as administrators on campus…How are we leading by example? Are we giving our teachers voice and purpose? Are we empowering them?" Data further revealed the systemization of teacher growth and development being seen as a responsibility of leadership. For example, specific roles were established in order to dedicate district resources to this initiative. The same principal in South district explained, "We're only going to [see teachers flourish] if we change the way we support, the way we build culture. If we don't do that systematically, then we're going to continue to have gaps." One of the ways in which support of teachers was systematized within these districts of study is the role of the Coach. In South district, for example, the peer coach has a partial release position, meaning they continue to teach a portion of their classes for students while serving as a coach at the same school site. A coach from South referred to this dynamic as "peer-level support." One of the intentions behind this type of peer-to-peer coaching was to "build teachers' capacity to support one another," a South coach explained. Another coach from South described their position in this way:

> What I get to do is empower others: look at promising practices, strengthening emerging leaders. So whether they're new teachers, or whether they're teachers that have been teaching a couple of years, or whether they're well-seasoned, leaning into them. And I know I don't have it all – I want to learn from them. And then documenting promising practices, which at my site…we call them "Family Supporting Family" tips. We look at these promising practices, and we share them with one another. I can't do it by myself – I'm just one person in a team. But one thing I can do is bring people together because I have that time stewarded to support the entire school.

Such sharing of practices requires trust, which points to the necessity of strong relationships amongst staff. Because the coaches in South "work horizontally with teachers," it establishes a culture of teachers supporting teachers rather than "...doing this because the district says I [have to do] it," explained a coach. The coaching, therefore, was a purposeful system embedded into district operations to ensure teachers received professional development in a supportive environment that promoted vulnerability and growth in service of the whole child.

An Emphasis on Relationships

Establishing and maintaining relationships was a common theme within the data. Such relationship-building was described as two-fold, including relationships between teachers/school personnel and students and relationships amongst colleagues, coaches, and supervisors. First, the whole child approach was predicated on trusting relationships between school personnel and students. A teacher from North noted, "We can't help kids if we don't know who they are," while another North teacher shared, "I feel like here we're aware of those basic needs that need to be met before getting to the learning." These data suggest that relationships with students were a primary focus of whole child education, which translated into relationships as a central component of whole teacher development. A coach from South explained how the "...work of supporting the whole child cannot be done in a silo," thus articulating the belief that whole child education depends on relationships between adults. Such relationship building was also identified as a strategic practice in order to build "the space for people to do the collaborative work," as stated by an administrator from North district.

Purposeful relationship-building was identified as a critical component of coaching culture and leadership style in these districts. For example, a coach from North district reflected, "[My] approach to leadership is to stand aside and to facilitate relationships, small group relationships, individual relationships, and then whole group relationships. And that's been a big focus for me, finding creative ways to build relationships between teachers." Additionally, a coach from South noted, "I think that's one of the prime characteristics of all of our coaches – having the ability to make connections with people individually, to build relationships so that you can establish that trust with teachers." This coach named that "relationship capital" was important within the school setting, as the work of whole child requires a strong, cohesive team moving together toward a common goal. The districts of study codified the critical role of relationships and purposeful relationship-building by incorporating it within the job description of coaches who supported teachers.

Conditions and Systems of Whole Teacher Development

The second research question of the current study explored the conditions and systems of whole teacher development within the two districts. In the context of this paper, *systems* encompass specific practices, routines, and procedures. *Conditions* refer to the intentions behind established systems – the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes aimed at holistically supporting the whole teacher. These definitions were inductively extrapolated from the data, arising out of the experiences and reflections of teachers, coaches, and site administrators. The results for this research question are presented concurrently in this section given the interconnected nature of conditions and systems wherein conditions *inform* systems and systems *engender* conditions. Data revealed three major interconnected conditions and systems: 1) a culture of trust (condition) promoting coaching and mentorship (systems); 2) a culture of innovation (condition) connected to shared leadership (system); and 3) a culture of collaboration (condition) linked to formal and informal collaboration opportunities (systems).

Condition: Culture of Trust

System: Coaching and Mentorship. As noted above in the findings, our data showed that strong relationships amongst colleagues in large part defined the concept of whole teacher, just as the whole child approach emphasizes relationships between school faculty/staff and students. Further analysis, however, revealed that the emphasis on relationships established a

staff culture of trust, which permitted the coaching and mentorship systems to actualize. As mentioned, professional growth is a primary component of whole teacher development; thus, the coaching systems are integral to whole teacher. A teacher from North shared, "I think we do a good job as a staff of supporting each other. Not just 'these are the things you should do with your kids,' but mentally supporting each other – supporting each other's well-being." Another teacher from North underscored the reciprocal supportive environment when they explained,

> We're comfortable with each other. We're comfortable being vulnerable with each other. If I'm having a terrible day and things have gone terribly wrong with the lesson, I can go to almost anyone's room and be like, 'OK, this didn't go well. What did I do?' And people will help me talk through that without shame.

Put simply, strong relationships built trust, and when trust was present, teachers were able to garner support from their professional peers. Trust was further facilitated through strategic coaching systems established within the districts to ensure mentorship and individualized professional development of teachers. The coaching structures varied across the two districts. In South, the coaching role was a partial-release position, meaning coaches continued to be classroom teachers (with a lighter teaching course load) while they provided mentorship and instructional support to their colleagues. These school-based teacher/coach positions specifically ensured the implementation of whole teacher development in service of the whole child. Meanwhile, North district had dedicated coaches at the district level working across schools. North coaches supported specific competency areas (e.g., literacy, numeracy, social/emotional learning) and focused on whole teacher development within the context of their specific competency.

Within both coaching structures, data showed that developing a culture of trust and relationship building were primary responsibilities of coaches and administrators. For example, an administrator from North stated, "One of the biggest parts of our job is to just support – to be there for teachers, to make their life easier." Meanwhile, a coach from South described their coaching role as, "Providing that space where it's okay to come and just be honest and genuine…[about] how things are going." The intentional prioritization of relationship-building within the role of a coach was underscored when a coach at South noted, "To me, it's just that ability to create the relationships with [teachers], to find in them what their strengths are." According to the data, such coaching and mentorship systems proved effective in enabling the condition of building a culture of trust. As a coach from South shared, "I think there's a huge amount of trust – with us, in our administrators, and everywhere in between."

Condition: Innovation

System: Shared Leadership. The data revealed the districts of study valued innovation, which was described by one teacher from North as "permission to try things." A teacher from North reflected, "I've pitched some pretty intense class ideas to the administration and to my department heads…". This culture of innovation – innovative thinking, pedagogy, and practices – was discussed within the context of a major system: shared leadership. Shared leadership was explained by a North coach as "...a practice to break down the hierarchy and make leadership more horizontal – taking a personalized approach to how we view leadership and how we develop people." This purposeful shared leadership practice within the districts was noted as an

intentional and integral part of whole teacher development "to multiply teacher leadership" said a coach from South.

The condition of innovation – in which teachers were encouraged to be creative in their pedagogy and practice – was consistently discussed by teachers within the context of a shared leadership system in which administrators demonstrated openness to new ideas. A teacher from North explained that, when they expressed a desire to try a gradeless classroom, the administrator's response was, "Sure, what's the worst thing that's going to happen?" Meanwhile, another teacher from North shared, "If you ever have an idea where you want to try something [new], there is always time to bring it to an administrator. They are always willing to listen." Teacher innovation and shared leadership were described as concurrent in that a supportive and shared leadership approach fostered a culture of innovation. Teacher innovation also pushed on a traditional leadership model broadly and allowed for teachers to demonstrate and nurture their leadership skills. Teachers shared that their administrators consistently remarked, "Let's do it!" in response to different approaches. Such attitudes emboldened teachers to conjure new ideas for teaching and learning, which was described as an integral component of whole teacher development.

Teacher innovation, however, was dependent on administrator endorsement and a willingness to shift traditional leadership roles. A leader in South explained, "We are getting more and more district leaders who are willing to take the risk and allow teachers to teach and innovate." Data showed that such acceptance of and participation in these non-traditional systems was partially connected to the decreased emphasis on standardized testing within the districts of study. A leader from South noted the importance of districts "...having the courage to trust in teachers to transcend the usual metrics. In the United States, we have 20 years of standardized testing, and a whole generation of teachers and students who know no other way of measuring teaching and learning." These data underscore the reciprocal nature of teacher innovation and shared leadership in that teachers were free to be innovative and participate in leadership opportunities while school and district leadership created the conditions for instructional creativity.

Condition: Collaboration

System: Formal and Informal Opportunities for Collaboration. Finally, the data revealed collaboration as a significant condition of the districts of study, centered around the belief that whole child education requires "not having teachers siloed out", as described by a coach from South. The intentional de-siloing of teaching - work that is both easily and traditionally siloed - was a driver of the collaborative practices in the districts of study. The data showed that formal systems were purposefully established by administrators to promote teacher collaboration and provide the opportunity for staff to work together, and teachers expressed taking advantage of these opportunities. A teacher from North district said, "We have a block [of time] where we can collaborate, and we use it - we use it 100% of the time. We're always working on something during that time." In the districts of study, teachers were connected by courses and grade level, which allowed them to purposefully work together to support particular students. Another teacher from North shared, "I have a teaching partner, and we share the same two classes. And then we work together in terms of things like classroom community building, and sometimes we do cross-curricular things." Such partnerships were intentionally created within the school's schedule to allow for teachers to work together in service of "providing that space for the teachers to build their capacity," explained a coach from South. In the district, a

weekly professional development meeting time granted teachers "about an hour to come together and work together," shared an administrator from South. Such time was used for teachers to collaborate with content teams or grade level teams, but the time remained constant each week.

In addition to these professional development meeting times, multiple participants from South district described "learning walks" as an integral collaborative professional development practice. Learning walks were described as established time for teachers to observe their colleagues instructing students. Learning walks, which were only approximately five minute observations ("tidbits", as they were called by a South district coach), were conducted in teams alongside a coach. A coach from South shared,

> Every time I take teams into classrooms, I love that part of my job, because I like to steal all the great things that I see. And I reach out to those people and ask, 'How did you do this? How do you set this up? How can we do this in other classrooms? Will you share this with other people?'

The practices observed throughout these learning walks were then shared across the school to ensure all team members had access to the practices. Such formal professional development opportunities were intentionally rooted within school systems to foster collaboration.
While the formal systems were embedded within schedules in order to carve out particular space for faculty to collaborate, data showed informal collaborative opportunities were utilized by participants as well. A teacher from North shared,

> Most people do some sort of collaboration, but it's not necessarily formalized - like you're scheduled with people. It's more of, 'Oh, I'm teaching this, you're teaching this, I like your approach, you like something I'm doing. Let's get together and see what we can do [because] we share kids.'

Such informal practices highlighted the condition of collaboration: school personnel valued working in teams in support of students. Because collaboration was valued, folks naturally prioritized working with others. A coach from South district shared, "Some of the best professional development are hallway conversations when you're asking someone, 'What have you been working on? What's something you tried?'" Casual check-ins and work time with colleagues – outside of the scope of formal professional development or established meeting time – demonstrated the condition of collaboration: collaboration was valued because it was understood as a necessary driver of the whole child approach and a critical component of whole teacher development.

Discussion and Implications

Interconnectedness of Whole Teacher Development and Whole Child Education

Findings from this study suggest that whole teacher development must be prioritized by schools and districts in order for teachers to effectively facilitate whole child education. Prior research articulates the connections between student and teacher development, noting that quality student-teacher relationships (Daily et al., 2019; Harding et al., 2019) and the careful cultivation of work and learning environments that foster respect, belonging, value, and trust are integral to nurturing student and teacher well-being (Gray et al., 2017; Roffey, 2012; Spilt et al., 2011). A

student's learning environment *is* a teacher's working environment. Just as whole child education frameworks articulate the importance of positive developmental relationships and environments filled with safety and belonging (Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children, 2021), whole teacher development is contingent on strong relationships built between teachers, amongst teachers and their colleagues, and between teachers and students (Osher, 2024). Further, supporting whole teacher development through relational peer-coaching systems mirrors the type of teaching suited for whole child approaches - empowering and trusting (Learning Policy Institute, 2021; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Systems-level approaches to whole child education, such as community schooling, similarly emphasize supportive environmental conditions that nurture strong relationships and community, recognizing the role of these elements in both student and teacher thriving and improving equitable outcomes for students from traditionally underserved communities (Blank et al., 2023; California Department of Education, 2022).

Leveraging coaching and mentorship structures that honor the multi-dimensional nature of teachers, build upon their strengths, and forge trusting relationships can also support whole teacher development and professional well-being. Using a partial release peer coaching structure and disentangling coaching from teacher evaluation can both better position coaches to authentically partner with teachers on their professional development journeys and work to flatten traditional leadership hierarchies within schools (Learning Policy Institute, 2022). Future research could explore the possibilities of designing holistic evaluation cycles that align with the continuous process of teacher development, incorporates multiple forms of evidence of whole student growth in the classroom, and incentivizes the spread of whole child pedagogical expertise. District leadership in both North and South districts have taken steps in this direction. By shifting the district-wide focus away from standardized test scores and towards multiple measures of whole child development, North and South districts have supported a culture of trust in teacher's capacity to innovate and adaptively meet students' needs, shifting job demands in a more empowering and innovative direction (Cazes et al., 2015; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Focusing on the learning process for both student and teacher as opposed to high-stakes measures of test-driven accountability can promote student and teacher well-being alike (Berryhill et al., 2009; Lee & Lee, 2020).

Bidirectionality of Conditions and Systems for Whole Teacher Development

When implementing new approaches, we tend to look for step-by-step guidelines, seeking to understand what must be in place before moving on to the next step. With supporting whole teacher development, findings from this study demonstrate that school districts must simultaneously engage with nurturing conditions and building systems. One does not exist without the other; conditions inform systems and systems foster conditions. In this study, data revealed the interconnectedness of the condition of trust with the system of coaching and mentorship, the condition of innovation with systems of shared leadership, and the condition of collaboration with systems of both formal and informal collaboration. Yet, this idea can extend to other components of teacher well-being and whole teacher development. Conditions of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and self-efficacy are inextricably linked with the systems that engender them, including meaningful professional learning communities, professional growth opportunities, and relational mentorship and coaching (Cross & Falconer, 2021; Durrant, 2019; McCallum et al., 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Importance of Developing a Shared Understanding and Commitment to Whole Teacher Development at the District Level

Relatedly, findings demonstrated the role of district leadership in developing a shared understanding and commitment to whole teacher development in service of whole child education and teacher well-being. District leadership plays an integral role in developing a culture of holistic support - the conditions that foster the mindsets and behaviors of teachers, coaches, and site administrators to engage with the systems needed to build whole child educational ecosystems within schools (Bartlett et al., 2024; Osher, 2024). Data showed that North and South districts built shared understanding and commitment through the implementation of supportive systems of whole teacher development, namely their coaching structures, formal collaboration opportunities, and emphasis on whole child measures as opposed to standardized test scores as the paramount indicator of student success.

The data indicated that the districts of study designed and established teacher coaching roles that positioned coaches as peer support, as partners in innovation, and as collaborative problem-solvers. Study participants noted that these coaching structures worked to remove the leadership hierarchy often associated with the evaluative coach-teacher dynamic and incubated the vulnerability required to innovate in the classroom (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Similar coaching structures can be embedded within leadership models common in public schools, such as distributive leadership that emphasizes expertise across roles (Harris, 2004) or the collaborative leadership of community schooling (Blank et al., 2023; Fehrer et al., 2016). Such approaches ground collaboration in the local context and build on existing relationships amongst teachers within a school community. Both districts' approaches to coaching sought to empower teachers, leveraging coaching to elevate strengths and amplify talent as opposed to evaluate and correct. Furthermore, both districts of study engaged teachers and coaches in decision-making processes, infusing practitioner voice into leadership spaces, an agentive approach shown to bolster teacher well-being (Steiner et al, 2022; Walker, 2022).

Our findings showed that both districts included in this study incubate cultures of innovation by providing teachers release time to formally collaborate, but do so without prescribing, at least in full, the what and how of 'leading' with their colleagues. In North district, individual teachers or groups of teachers (e.g., a grade level team or subject team) can take full days away from the classroom to think, reflect, plan, and dream about what is possible for their students. This kind of space for collaborative inquiry is rare in western teaching environments; when provided, space for collaborative inquiry enables teachers to focus on the possibilities with supporting students in building lives of meaning and purpose (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Levitan, 2023). While changing funding streams have halted this practice since the study was initially conducted, South district previously leveraged a weekly late-start-for-students structure to provide their teachers with protected collaboration time. The OECD's (2024) Education at a Glance report places teachers in upper-secondary schools in the United States as teaching more hours in front of students than most other developed nations included in the survey, working an average of 888 hours annually as compared to the OECD average of 679 hours. More hours in front of students translates into fewer hours dedicated to professional development, including time to collaborate with peers. A 2022 study identified teachers in the United States as using only 6% (3 out of 50 hours) of their weekly work time collaborating with peers or engaging in professional development activities (EdWeek Research Center & Merrimack College, 2022). Such a reality makes a district commitment to protected collaboration time all the more significant.

Finally, data showed that North and South districts demonstrated a commitment to whole child education, and correspondingly whole teacher development, through moving away from standardized test scores as the most significant measure of student success. The districts have moved towards more holistic forms of student feedback and measurements of student growth, such as portfolio assessment and reflection on deeper learning skill development. Both districts leverage their coaching and collaboration structures to engage teachers in innovating for an evolved vision of whole child development. Thus, the district systems of whole teacher development directly support whole child success in the classroom.

Limitations

There are three important limitations to the dual-case study explored in this article. First, we focused on the district as the unit of change, but many of the concepts explored can be applied to the school site as the unit of change. Future research could explore the development of conditions and system building in relation to the individual school site, honing in on the role of different formal and informal leadership positions in supporting whole teacher development. This study also focused on the experiences of secondary educators. While there is potential for similar themes to arise for school sites across age groups, further research is needed to understand conditions and systems of whole teacher development in elementary schools. Finally, while a purposive sampling method for interview and focus group participants yielded particularly detailed insights into the conditions and systems of whole teacher development from the perspective of teacher leaders, this method can miss the broader experience of the general educator population. Future studies would benefit from large-scale surveying or engaging diverse sampling procedures of educator experience for further qualitative inquiry.

Conclusion

Whole child education aims to reimagine schools as places that nurture the full potential of every student, leading to a more equitable and effective education system. To get there, we need to address whole teacher development, grounded in what Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) call 'collaborative professionalism,' and uplift key elements from this study such as fostering relational trust and a willingness to innovate. This study elevates the school district's role in supporting whole teacher development in order to support the whole child, recognizing the interconnectedness of student and teacher well-being. Districts can support whole teacher development by attending to the mutually reinforcing conditions and systems that create long-term, systemic and transformational change. In shifting approaches at the systems level, districts can sustain holistic outcomes for students and educators alike.

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