INTELLECTUAL GEMS

CROSS-FERTILIZATION OF EXPERIENCES AND EXPOSURES

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The views expressed by the authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or beliefs of the editor. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, errors can occur. Readers are humbly requested to exercise their judgment and verify information independently if needed.

Preface

"Intellectual Gems- Cross-fertilization of Experiences and Exposures" is a valuable resource for individuals who embrace the idea of knowledge sharing through Open Educational Practices (OEP).The goal is to raise awareness about the limitless dissemination of experiences and exposures through the culture of open sharing. It encourages a mindset where learning takes precedence over financial considerations, fueled by passion and a vision for a more inclusive education system.

Ever since embarking on my journey of exploring OEP, I have come to realize the immense potential and profound impact they have in disseminating open knowledge to the world.

This e-book is the result of collaborating with like-minded individuals from Norway, Turkey, Sweden, The United States, Pakistan, and The United Kingdom, who strongly believe in sharing open knowledge to the world.

This e-book covers a diverse range of subjects, including leadership, narratives of traumas, parenting, pedagogies, and storytelling. All the featured authors are highly esteemed and bear a significant responsibility to promote diversity and pluralism.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all the contributors who joined forces with me, to enrich the world with the gift of boundless knowledge.

Feel free to read, adapt, remix, and share the content in any way you like.

With utmost respect and gratitude

Dr. Munir Moosa Sadruddin

https://sites.google.com/view/munir-moosa-sadruddin/home?authuser=0

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Human-Centered Leadership in Education

Jennifer Hancock
Director, Humanist Learning Systems

Education has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with an increasing focus on humanistic approaches.

Humanistic leadership in education is based on the idea that education should not only focus on learners' academic achievement but also their holistic development. This chapter introduces the concept of humanistic leadership in education and highlights its benefits for educators. By prioritizing compassion, empathy, authenticity, and ethics, we can establish an inclusive, supportive, and inspiring learning environment for our students.

It's all About Values

Values provide a framework for decision-making, problem-solving, and discussion. When you aren't sure of the correct response or the right course of action, you can figure out a solution based on values. I employ the same strategy as they align with my core moral values and yield good results.

Human-Centered Leadership is a value-driven approach. It focuses on four key humanistic commitments

| Compassion | Empathy | Authenticity | Ethics |

As compassion educators, we have a responsibility to create a safe and nurturing environment for students, and to make them learn morally and grow ethically. Showing compassion means taking the time to understand our students' struggles and supporting them as they navigate challenges.

Empathy is a little different from compassion. Compassion is feeling sympathy. Empathy involves putting ourselves in our students' shoes and understanding their experiences and perspectives. By practicing empathy, we can tailor our teaching methods to meet learners' needs and ensure that everyone feels included and valued.

Authenticity is central to Human-Centered Leadership. Being authentic means being true to ourselves and acting in a way that aligns with our values. As educators, we need to model the behavior we want to see in our students and build trust through openness and honesty.

Finally, ethics are integral to Human-Centered Leadership. Upholding high standards of integrity and accountability means doing the right thing, even when it's difficult. As educators, we must make decisions that align with our core values and consider the impact they will have on learners and the wider community.

Significance for Educators

As educators, we have a unique opportunity to shape the lives of our students. By embracing these principles, we can create a learning environment that is inclusive, supportive, and

inspiring. By acting with compassion, empathy, authenticity, and ethics, we can empower our students to become the best versions of themselves.

Compassionate Leadership
We need to create a safe and nurturing learning environment that supports and values our students. No one learns well when they feel threatened or afraid. Kids who are hungry, or who are just trying to survive may not have the brain power to devote to learning something abstract, like math. Compassionate leadership is a critical element of this process. By embodying this principle, we can create a culture of empathy and understanding that empowers our students to overcome their difficulties so that they can transcend whatever difficult situations they are enduring. Every child is unique and has a unique situation and difficulties. Compassionate leadership doesn't demand people pretend everything is ok when it isn't. Instead, it allows individuals to be – individuals and meets them where they are, and helps them get to where they want to go.

Listen Actively
Active listening involves paying close attention to the thoughts, feelings, and concerns of our students and responding with empathy and understanding. When we demonstrate active listening, we signal to our students that we care about their well-being and value their input. However, balancing the needs of individual students with the needs of the entire class can be challenging, and we must be mindful of this balance. For instance, if a student has serious problems that cannot be addressed quickly, it is unfair to make the rest of the students wait to start their work while helping the individual. In this case, it's good to acknowledge the problem will need additional support that you intend to provide, and then move the rest of the class onto their assignments or to the lesson of the day. Just don't forget to come back to the student with the problem and address their issues privately or in more detail as needed.

Be Supportive
As educators, we must support our students in both their academic and personal pursuits. This means providing them with the resources and guidance they need to succeed and celebrating their successes. We can also encourage and support students with specific interests by tying our lessons to their interests. For instance, if you have a young child obsessed with dinosaurs or horses, you can use horses or dinosaurs as examples. You can also allow children to choose their favorite topics to write about so that they can personalize whatever the lesson is. My son went through a period, where he was obsessed with the Titanic. One of his teachers sent him home with a spelling worksheet that was about the Titanic. These efforts to personalize the lessons to the children let them know that you see them fully and that you, as an adult, are willing to help them explore their passions.

Build a Sense of Community
We should nurture a sense of community. This involves promoting collaboration, teamwork, mutual dignity, and respect in the classroom. When students feel like they are part of a community, they are more likely to feel valued and supported. To do this well, it is vital to be on the lookout for students who are excluded and work to find ways to include them. For example, if a student is struggling to fit in with a particular group, we could consider pairing them with another student who shares their interests.

Show Kindness
Compassionate leadership also means showing kindness. It requires us to understand that our students may face challenges we know nothing about and to be patient and supportive as they

work through them. As educators, we can demonstrate kindness by acknowledging and addressing our students' mental and emotional health needs and providing them with the resources and support they need to thrive.

Examples of Compassionate Leadership in Education
Providing students with individualized attention and feedback that addresses their unique needs and learning styles.

Acknowledging and addressing student's mental and emotional health needs, and providing them with resources and support. This can be getting assistance from the school counselor or psychologist if available, helping the parents by referring them to resources that may be available in the community, or just acknowledging and including a child who needs extra attention in a lesson. It may be as simple as taking the time to read the notes about the children's special needs, so you understand why certain children are having difficulties. For example, my son has a developmental coordination disorder. He has the accommodations he needs to succeed in any classroom. It astonishes me how few of his teachers even read his accommodation report and have no idea what he needs to be able to even turn in schoolwork. At the same time, one of the reasons he's been successful is that his school counselors recommended that I seek out professional support outside the school that helped me get him assessed properly so that we could know what accommodations would work best for him.

Encourage students to learn from their failures and recognize that their mistakes do not define them.

Create a culture of appreciation and positivity by recognizing and encouraging our students' efforts and achievements.

The Benefits of a Compassionate Classroom
By listening actively, being supportive, building a sense of community, and showing kindness, we can create a culture of empathy and understanding in our classrooms that encourages our students to reach their full potential. By embracing compassionate leadership, we can empower our students to become confident, resilient, and successful learners.

If any student lacks confidence, offering help to identify their areas of excellence can help boost their self-confidence. Some students learn by watching and absorbing information before acting on it while others dive in without adequate information and learn from their mistakes. Both learning styles are valid. It's ok for the observers to observe. The challenge for teachers is to help those silent observers share what they have learned. It's not unusual for the - dive in and learn from mistake types to get all the glory. Just remember to distribute glory to those that are the observers too. They need both spaces to learn in the way that is best for them and encourage them to share and shine once they feel comfortable doing so.

The Power of Empathy
Empathy is a vital element in education that goes beyond simple compassion and kindness. It involves understanding the perspectives and feelings of others by putting ourselves in their shoes, and imagining what it would be like to experience their situation. This can change the way we respond to students and help us become more effective and strategic educators.

Being Empathetic
To truly be empathetic, we must actively listen to our students and strive to understand their perspectives, suspending our judgments and assumptions and focusing on their experiences. When we approach our interactions with empathy, we can better tailor our responses to meet the student's needs and be more effective in our approach, leading to better outcomes for our students. For example, I went to the University of Hawaii at Manoa, where I studied linguistics. In a course on early childhood language learning, we were told about a mistake a well-meaning teacher made when trying to teach the English alphabet to children whose first language was not American English, but Hawaiian Pidgeon. The teachers had set up letter stations around the room with pictures of different objects. They asked the kids to put the picture with the first letter the word starts with. To their surprise, many students put a flower under P instead of F. The teachers kindly corrected them, saying, "No, this starts with F," and moved the picture to F. However, the teachers didn't know that the students were using the Hawaiian word for flower, which is "Pua." "Pua" starts with a P, and the children were placing the picture correctly for the word they were using. Teachers assumed the kids were using the same word they were when they weren't. The teachers didn't bother to check what word the kids thought the picture showed. This example highlights the importance of empathy in understanding students' experiences.

When you think about empathy, consider what you don't know and avoid making assumptions about why children behave in a certain way. Instead, find out by asking them questions. A simple question such as "what is this?" and allowing the child to respond with "pua" would have fixed the problem in my Hawaiian example. However, the teachers did not consider what the children were experiencing, only what they thought the children were experiencing.

Empathy serves as a reminder that not everyone experiences the same things even in the same situation and looking at the same images. Applying empathy when a problem arises can prevent miscommunication and confusion for everyone involved.

Change How You Respond
Empathy transforms the way we engage with students. Instead of providing generic advice, we can tailor our responses to individual needs. By doing so, we become more effective and strategic in our approach, ultimately leading to better outcomes for our students.

It's Not What You Think the Problem Is that Matters; It's What They Think the Problem Is
The key takeaway is to remember that it's not about you. Rather, it's about what the student perceives as the problem. Listening to their concerns and understanding narratives is important in addressing their needs effectively. Don't assume you know everything. As adults, things that may seem obvious to us can be completely foreign to children.

Examples of Empathy in Action in Education
Actively listen to a struggling student's perspective before offering guidance, acknowledge and provide resources for emotional or traumatic experiences, and encourage open discussion and sharing of thoughts and experiences in class.

For instance, in a classroom in Hawaii, where students spoke a different language, teachers failed to consider the students' native language and repeatedly corrected them for "incorrectly" labeling pictures. By taking the time to understand the students' native language and word

associations, the teachers could have provided a more effective learning environment. Because they didn't apply empathy, they harmed the children they were trying to help.

Remember that empathy allows us to focus on what the student thinks the problem is, rather than assuming we know best. By prioritizing the needs and experiences of our students, we can create a supportive learning environment and help them achieve better outcomes.

Authenticity- Being Real in the Classroom Teachers who are authentic create a learning environment that encourages students to be their authentic selves as well. It requires being genuine, true to oneself, and acknowledging one's strengths and limitations.

Authentic teachers are aware of their biases and strive to overcome them. They recognize the importance of being open and honest with their students, and they build trusting relationships by showing vulnerability and sharing personal stories. Authenticity also involves being willing to admit when you don't know something and being open to learning alongside your students. By doing so, teachers create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and taking risks in their learning.

Why Authenticity Matters
Being authentic in the classroom matters as it helps establish a genuine connection between teachers and their students. When teachers are true to themselves, they set an example for their students to follow, creating an environment where everyone can be honest and authentic. Students can easily sense when someone is being fake or insincere, and it can create a sense of distrust and disconnection. However, when teachers lead with authenticity, they inspire trust and respect, which can lead to positive and engaging learning experiences. Additionally, an authentic approach means being open to feedback, allowing teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and improve upon them, ultimately resulting in a better learning experience for their students.

How to Cultivate Authenticity
Cultivating authenticity in ourselves requires deep self-awareness and self-acceptance. A shining example of such authenticity was my mother-in-law's husband, Charlie. He was comfortable with himself. He never imposed his expectations or tried to change anyone else to fit his expectations of them. Instead, he interacted with others honestly, openly, and with a profound sense of love. Charlie's authenticity allowed him to connect with people on a deeper level, regardless of their differences. He was ok with himself and that made him ok with everyone else.

To be authentic, we must be honest about our strengths and weaknesses and embrace our unique qualities. This means acknowledging that we don't have all the answers and being willing to ask for help when needed. Authenticity is especially important in the classroom because students can easily detect when someone is being fake or insincere.

The teachers I remember most fondly were those who were authentic with us, like my middle school Spanish teacher and my high school advanced placement biology teacher. Despite their vastly different teaching styles, they shared a commitment to being genuine with their students. What they had in common is they were fully human with us, had high standards for us, and, most importantly, they were kind.

Real-life Implementation

Striking a balance between authenticity and professionalism can be challenging in the classroom. But it's not an either/or situation - we can be genuine and open with our students while still setting boundaries and maintaining appropriate relationships. By being authentic, we can inspire our students to be themselves and pursue their passions. At the same time, we need to be role models for our students and always demonstrate professionalism.

For example, my high school advanced placement teacher had a prim and proper appearance, with a beehive and thick glasses. In the 1980s in Los Angeles, she was decidedly old-fashioned in appearance. It was her genuine caring and authenticity that made us work so hard for her. She didn't tolerate nonsense and had high expectations for us, but she always remained true to herself. We respected and loved her for it.

Maintaining Your Professionalism

Being authentic means sharing your joy of learning with your students. It doesn't mean you should be unprofessional or disregard the rules. Nor does it mean trying to be cool or friends with your students. As a teacher, you are responsible for adhering to school policies and guidelines while maintaining appropriate relationships with your students. By being genuine to yourselves, you can build trust and respect with your students, leading to more positive outcomes for everyone and greater job satisfaction.

Authenticity in Action in Education

Sharing personal experiences or struggles with our students can be a powerful way to demonstrate that we are human and imperfect, and to let them know that what they are experiencing is normal. Of course, it's important to keep these anecdotes relevant to the lesson at hand, but showing vulnerability and authenticity can build trust and rapport, leading to more positive outcomes for everyone.

In addition to sharing personal stories, transparency is another key component of authenticity in the classroom. Being clear and upfront about teaching methods, goals, and expectations can help students feel more confident and motivated in their learning. Above all, we must root for our students to succeed. Nothing is more devastating to a student's confidence than a teacher who expects them to fail. We should always see the potential for growth and improvement in every student, even when we are frustrated or facing challenges.

Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment is the most important thing we can do as educators. When our students feel valued, respected, and supported, they are more likely to engage with the material, participate in class discussions, and take risks in their learning. By cultivating authenticity, transparency, and empathy in our teaching, we can help create an empowering learning experience for all of our students.

The Power of Ethics in Creating Consensus

Ethics establish a framework for productive discussions in the classroom and create consensus around appropriate behavior. It allows us to examine our own biases and assumptions and to approach discussions with a willingness to listen and learn from others. Additionally, an ethical approach can help identify and address potential conflicts and ensure that everyone's voice is heard and valued. Ultimately, prioritizing ethics in the classroom creates an environment that supports meaningful dialogue, critical thinking, and personal growth for both teachers and students.

By prioritizing ethics, we set a standard for how we treat others and ourselves, which in turn builds a foundation of trust and respect that fosters collaboration and positive relationships. Further, it can create consensus and promote productive discussions, we can navigate complex issues and challenges in the classroom. When we engage in discussions from an ethical standpoint, we create a safe and inclusive environment that encourages diverse perspectives and promotes learning.

The Importance of Ethics in Establishing Consensus
Ethics plays an important role in creating a harmonious and productive learning environment. Prioritizing ethics means that we can establish shared values and principles that guide our actions and decisions. In the classroom, this can mean creating a shared understanding of what constitutes appropriate behavior and communication and ensuring that everyone is held to the same standards. By establishing these shared values, we can foster a sense of dignity and respect, which can lead to greater collaboration and a more positive classroom dynamic.

The Power of Ethics in Productive Discussions
Prioritizing ethics can also promote critical thinking and meaningful discussions in the classroom. When we establish a framework for ethical behavior and decision-making, it provides a basis for productive and respectful dialogue. Students can engage in thoughtful discussions while respecting the diverse opinions and perspectives of their peers. This can lead to a deeper understanding of complex issues and help students develop important skills in communication, collaboration, and critical thinking.

In the classroom, ethics can supercharge your students' learning experience! By putting ethics at the forefront, we can create a solid foundation of shared values and principles that guide everyone's actions and decisions toward a common goal. You can ask students to come up with a shared ethical definition of what a good solution looks like and have them discuss how to create that good solution. It's like having a roadmap for success that everyone understands and can follow!

Not only that, but ethics can also help us create an environment of trust that fosters open and honest discussions. By establishing a framework for productive conversations, we can find common ground and generate innovative solutions to challenges. Don't underestimate the power of ethics in creating a classroom that is collaborative, creative, and positive for everyone!

Your Commitment to Ethics
Ethics is not just a set of rules to follow, it's a commitment to yourself and your community. Upholding ethical principles and values is your responsibility as a teacher, and you are expected to model ethical behavior for your students. Prioritizing ethics sets an example and creates a culture of integrity and trust in the classroom.

It's important to note that ethics should be inclusive and accessible to everyone, regardless of their personal beliefs or backgrounds. Rather than invoking personal, religious, or cultural reasons for holding specific values, a teacher should focus on the ethical value itself, such as compassion or honesty. This way, we create a shared understanding and language around ethics that everyone can participate in and benefit from regardless of background.

Examples of Ethics in Action in Education
- It's important to establish clear guidelines for appropriate behavior and expectations for classroom discussions.
- Prioritize dignity and inclusion in all interactions with students and colleagues.
- When discussing problem-solving in the context of a lesson, it's helpful to ask what a "good" solution might be and engage students in ethical considerations. However, it's important to enforce behavioral guidelines in case of disagreements.
- It is essential to lead by example and make ethical decisions that prioritize the well-being of students and foster positive relationships.

Dealing with Challenges
As an educator, implementing Human-Centered Leadership in the classroom can present a variety of challenges. Allowing for individualism in a classroom has the potential to disrupt classroom lessons. Humans are messy creatures and opening the door to supporting students beyond just their lesson can be like opening a pandora's box. Additionally, attempting to establish an ethical consensus opens the doors to disputes.

By using compassion, empathy, authenticity, and ethics we can better address the challenges we and our students face. Dealing with challenges can be overwhelming, but by utilizing these core principles, educators can develop effective strategies to navigate them.

Using Compassion to Address Challenges
Compassion is a powerful tool for addressing challenges in the classroom. When we approach challenges with compassion, we can see the situation from the perspective of those involved and respond in a supportive way. This means acknowledging the dignity and concerns of everyone involved and showing understanding and empathy. By doing so, we can build trust and foster positive relationships, even in the face of adversity. Incorporating compassion into our approach can not only help us resolve conflicts, but it can also create a more supportive and positive classroom environment.

Applying Empathy to Understand Challenges
Dealing with challenges in the classroom can be difficult, but applying empathy can help us approach them more effectively. Empathy allows us to see the situation from the perspective of others. By doing this, we can base our responses on the student's reality rather than our assumptions. Keep an open mind and be willing to listen to different viewpoints, as this can lead to discovering new insights and solutions you may not have considered otherwise.

Empathy gives us a deeper understanding of students' experiences and helps us respond in a way that is more effective and supportive. By using our newfound knowledge of the other person's perspective, we can build consensus around the best course of action. It's essential to remember that the problem may not be what we initially think it is, and by being empathetic, we can uncover new insights and solutions.

Being Authentic When Facing Challenges
Being authentic helps when facing challenges in the classroom. By showing vulnerability and being genuine, we can build trust with our students and colleagues. We can acknowledge when something is indeed a problem and that even though we are the teachers, we might not know the best course of action and it's okay to make mistakes if you fix them. This creates a safe and supportive environment for problem-solving and encourages students to feel comfortable asking for help. It's important to acknowledge our limitations and seek help when needed, and

model the behavior we want to see in our students. By being authentic, we can foster positive relationships and create a culture of openness and honesty in the classroom.

Using Ethics to Guide Decision-Making During Challenges
Ethics is essential when dealing with challenges in the classroom. Approach these situations with integrity and honesty, seeking consensus around ethical behavior and decision-making. By prioritizing ethical considerations, we can ensure that our actions and decisions are guided by a set of shared values and principles that promote fairness and respect for all.

Adopting a human-centered leadership approach can help us navigate difficult situations with dignity, grace, and integrity. It's important to remember that challenges provide an opportunity for growth and learning, and by approaching them with a human-centered mindset, we can create a positive and supportive learning environment for all. By using tools such as compassion, empathy, authenticity, and ethics, we can build trust, foster positive relationships, and inspire our students to become ethical and compassionate leaders themselves.

Taking Action
As educators, we have the opportunity to create a positive and supportive learning environment. By prioritizing compassion, empathy, authenticity, and ethics, we can make a difference in their lives. Let's take what we have learned and apply it in our classrooms, and let's share our experiences with others.

Applying Human-Centered Leadership in the Classroom
Focus on the well-being of your students and create a safe and supportive environment for learning. This takes practice and may require additional learning, but let's commit to using these tools to guide our decision-making and to support our students through their challenges.

For instance, an important way to make sure your classroom is an emotionally safe place is to ensure bullying doesn't happen. I have free anti-bullying resources to help teachers learn how to use behavioral science to improve behavior in the classroom and to stop unwanted behavior like bullying. This is science-based and not yet widely taught. Take advantage of these free resources available at: https://bullyvaccineproject.com/

Sharing Your Experiences with Others
As we apply human-centered leadership in our classrooms, we can also share our experiences to inspire and support other educators who are also striving to create a positive and supportive learning environment. Let's commit to being open and honest with each other, and to learning from our collective experiences.

I encourage you to take what you have learned and apply it in your classrooms. Let's prioritize compassion, empathy, authenticity, and ethics in our daily practice, and let's share our experiences with others. Together, we can create a more positive and supportive learning environment for all of our students.

Trauma- From Darkness to Light

Terrilynn Renella
3xCancerThriver, Author, Transforming Lives

Trauma can have a significant impact on a person's mental health and overall well-being. It also has a profound effect on the individuals you live with, primarily your family. Trauma causes a ripple effect and it is important to be conscious of everyone affected, not just the individual going through trauma.

I have had years and years of trauma that has not only affected me but also my family. Trauma from childhood sexual abuse, losing a brother to suicide, a violent sexual assault at gunpoint in my home - I was 24; losing another brother and my dad suddenly; losing my mom and my only remaining sibling within five weeks of each other; three-time cancer thriver - cancer almost took my life.

The three traumas, stories, and solutions I will focus on in this chapter are related to loss, sexual assault/abuse, and traumatic Illnesses.

LOSS - How Love Can Break Your Heart
My dad's heart was broken by love after the death of my brother, Ron, who was his firstborn. Ron's passing was an unexpected tragedy that deeply affected my parents, especially given their ages at the time - my father was 77, and my mother was 80. Prior to Ron's death, our parents were doing well, living in Utah while my brothers and I resided in California.

After Ron's passing and funeral, my mom continually showed up in the Emergency Department believing she was having a heart attack. Each time she was suffering from anxiety attacks associated with the death of her son. Eventually, with my help, my mom joined a group of individuals who had also lost a child suddenly. This group saved my mom. My Father did not seek help.

I went to see my dad about six months after Ron's death. All the blinds and curtains were drawn in his home and every picture of my brother Ron was turned over, so my dad could not look at them. I had brought my daughter with me thinking seeing his granddaughter, who was three, would help cheer up my dad. It worked only for the time we spent with him.

Several months later, my dad had a stroke, and several years later, he passed away of a broken heart. Thus, I understand how loneliness can kill. I know if my dad had gotten back to his active social life and sought help, which my mom eventually did, he would have lived a lot longer.

Fifteen years after my dad passed, my mom and only remaining sibling, my brother, Mitch, passed within five weeks of each other. My heart didn't feel broken but rather shattered. Three years later, I was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer that almost took my life. The latest research shows that intense grief can also bring stress into the body and cause chronic disease.

Seek Help
Telling your story of loss and tragedy to others who have been through similar experiences is one of the most healing things an individual can do. Communities help the healing process.

Miracles Can Come Out of Tragedy- Always Have Faith
Some miracles came after Ron passed. He was an organ donor; thus, someone is walking around today with his eyes. And a person is living a much better life because they have my brother's kidneys.

Seventeen months after he left us, my beautiful daughter, Danika Alana was born. She was unexpected, just like Ron's death, and truly a ray of sunshine. When she grew a little older, random individuals would walk up to me in shopping malls and say they had never seen such a beautiful baby.

She has a radiance about her that to this day, I cannot explain. She is stunning, but there is so much more. I was witnessing God's Grace- another miracle that came from tragedy. This was a pattern I would see again and again not fully understanding until much later in life, the miracles that came out of tragedy.

Loss, Stress & The Body
Stress is the body's reaction to harmful situations whether it is real or imagined. When a person feels threatened, a chemical reaction occurs in the body that allows you to act on the perceived threat. If the threat is a big old lion, for example, then stress will cause blood to flow to your extremities, legs, feet, arms, etc., giving you more power to RUN! It will cause the heart to beat faster and our breathing to quicken. This reaction is known as fight or flight. Stress is not a bad thing in small doses. It allows us to get things done! However, if you are constantly in fight-flight, blood flow is taken away from the vital organs that need it! We are not equipped to handle long-term, chronic stress without ill consequences.

Stress affects every one of us. It builds up in the body over a long period. For me, it was losing my mom and my brother, the last two people I came into this world with, within five weeks of each other.

My body had been through so much stress over the years, and the overwhelming grief was too much for me. People would say your heart must be broken, but it was beyond that- it was utterly shattered. It seemed unfathomable that every person I had entered my life with had now departed: three brothers and both of my parents.

I have come to peace with losing these people I loved so dearly, however, I still miss them every day, especially, when I am going through something difficult and need advice, love, or a soft place to land.

The Symptoms of Stress
Stress affects all of your life-your behavior, emotions, ability to think clearly, and your physical health. No part of your body is immune to stress. Everyone handles stress differently and so the symptoms vary from person to person. I had a lot of symptoms in my body leading up to my cancer diagnosis. Colitis started when I was in my early twenties and was from stress. This led to being in the hospital multiple times.

Emotional symptoms include getting angry or agitated easily and also being moody. Also, feelings of being overwhelmed, as if you are losing control or need to take control of your life. Do you have a difficult time relaxing or calming your mind? And are you avoiding others? Physical symptoms include low energy, headaches, upset stomach plus aches, and pains. Insomnia, chest pains, frequent colds or the flu, stress, and loss of sexual desires.

The consequences of long-term stress can lead to serious health issues. This includes mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and personality disorders. Physical issues include cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and stroke.

Over the years, individuals I have worked with who were diagnosed with cancer were almost always diagnosed several years after losing someone very close to them, including me. I now know cancer is brought on by the ongoing low emotions of stress such as fear, anger, resentment, and especially grief.

Sexual Assault and Fear
Around the world, sexual assault is one of the most under-reported crimes and leads to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), addiction, and disease if kept a secret.

I was twenty-four. I was pretty, fit, confident, and living what I thought was a great life. I felt happy.

One day, I left work and went home for lunch. Shortly after I walked into my home, there was a knock on the door. I opened the door without bothering to see who stood on the other side. Something I will never do again.

At my door was a dirty-looking, messy man in his late twenties holding a backpack. I immediately felt unease, however, I engaged with this man, despite my strong intuition not to.

I felt frightened and wanted him to go away, so started to close the door. He forced the door open wider and pulled a gun out from behind his backpack. He shoved me inside, held the gun to my head, and shut the door. I have never been this frightened, ever. And I had never had a gun held to my head. I felt every difficult emotion possible, but most of all, I felt FEAR. Would this be my last day on this earth?

He held a gun to my head and kept telling me "If you make a sound, I will kill you." At that moment, all I could think of to do was pray. "Please God, do not take me now, it's way too soon". He sexually assaulted me as he held a gun to my head.

It seemed like hours and finally, he said, "If you tell anyone, I will come back and kill you." And after a few minutes, I heard nothing... Fear was coursing through every part of my body. I had no idea if he was still in my apartment. I went to the front door and it was closed but not fully shut. I shut the door and locked it.

I called one of my closest friends who lived in the same complex. Sobbing and in tears, I told her what happened. I requested her not to call the police because this man would come back to kill me. But she called the police, and within five minutes, there were over fifteen police squad cars. They were everywhere. I have never seen so many police officers in my life. And I was scared of a death threat. And I felt ashamed. The only thing that made it happen was I knew with a gun held to my head, fighting back would have been a bad idea thus the question, "Why didn't you fight back?" never haunted me. Now, what was I going to do? For the first time in my life, I did not feel safe.

FEAR ~ Buck the Norm
Life brings you to your knees. It brings you lower than you think you can go. But if you stand back up and move forward, if you go just a little farther, you will always find love. ~ Terrilyn Renella

FEAR is the one emotion that will take us down faster than any other emotion. And fear rules almost all of us. We live in fear of not being good enough; not being loved; not having enough money or losing our money, etc. Fear has always been prevalent in our lives, however, post-COVID, fear is ruling almost every single person's life on this planet worldwide. It is not fun to live in fear. I lived in fear for the majority of my life, especially after my sexual assault. I had PTSD.

Fear hurts our bodies and minds. It increases stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. Fear increases your blood pressure and heart rate. You start breathing faster. Even your blood flow changes — blood flows away from your heart and into your limbs, making it easier for you to start throwing punches, or run for your life. However, this is only supposed to happen when you are in danger, not over a prolonged period.

Fear weakens the immune system and can cause cardiovascular problems. It accelerates the aging process and can lead to premature death. Fear can cause depression, fatigue, and memory loss. It has been around us for a long time, but now, it seems every moment of the day we are living in fear of a disease that has taken control of our emotions a lot more than our bodies. How do we get out of the emotion of fear and the adverse effects it will have on our minds and bodies?

Reversing Fear
After my sexual assault, I found it impossible to feel safe in this world. And I did what I was taught. Ten months after the incident, I got married, quit my job, and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area away from the home, I had known for my entire life. I found it tough to walk outside alone.

No family, no friends, no one to lean on or talk to about my fears. I was struggling and for the first time in my life, I contemplated suicide. I did not tell a single soul how I was feeling, I felt too ashamed.

One day, I called a Rape Crisis Center. For some unknown reason, I will call it Angel intervention. The director of the center answered the phone. She became my savior- the person who would pull me up from one of the lowest points of my life. I explained my situation to her. For the first time since sexual assault, I was able to be real with one person.

I told her I was at my wit's end, and that I needed help or I could not go on living. She talked to me for a long time and asked me to see her again. Within days, I was sitting in front of Judy, who turned out to be one of the biggest angels of my life. She listened, loved me and I never felt judged.

After working with Judy, I started helping rape victims by volunteering at the Rape Crisis Center. Over the years as I helped others and told my story, I felt less fear and I felt less shame.

Let Go of Shame

Did you know that social anxiety, perfectionism, and busyness are just a few of the signs that we are operating from shame? Shame that we aren't good enough if we say the wrong thing, make a mistake or don't accomplish as many things in a day as we can.

Casandra Brené Brown is an American Professor, Author, and Podcast host and is known for her work on shame and vulnerability plus her widely viewed TEDx talk in 2010. Brené has also published six best-selling books. Her work encourages us to have courage, take off our masks, and open ourselves up. This may hurt. Being vulnerable is an act of courage. When we open up, we may experience hurtful criticism.

That happens to me often now that I am writing a book and posting many videos. However, the freedom and joy that will come from stepping into your authentic self-will override all of it.

Shame is a destructive emotion and is one of the major reasons we're afraid to be vulnerable. Remember, the world, society, and certain individuals like to shame us for being who we are, unique, quirky, someone who doesn't go with the flow, and different.

Embrace Your Uniqueness

Perhaps, the primary reason I now LOVE myself is that I spent most of my life hiding my vulnerability and protecting my heart from getting hurt. I was always trying to be perfect, say the right things, and "look the part." Now sure exactly what part I was trying to look at, and what image I was trying to project. How could I? I had no idea who I was because I was trying to project an image of perfection. Trust me, protecting and guarding your heart to avoid getting hurt is no way to live. Cancer changed all that for me.

Disease/Illness

Illness can be a traumatic experience for people and everyone they love. The effects can be long-lasting. I'm a 3xCancer thriver. Cancer almost took my life. The day I ended up in ICU on a ventilator, I had gotten up to go to work. I ran an organization, something I'd been doing successfully, or so I thought, for over 25 years.

Bagging

I could hear a young woman talking on the phone. I felt as if I was coming out of a dream, however, I could not open my eyes or move any part of my body. I felt as if I was having some type of strange dream that I could not awaken from.

Then I heard her telling the person she was speaking with that she needed to go because she was bagging a lady. Bagging? A lady? ME! Wait! Was I dead? I can't open my eyes or move my body. I am trying to think, remember, or feel something. I am paralyzed. Suddenly I couldn't hear the young woman talking, and I felt completely helpless. And finally, I began to remember a few things. I have massive tumors on the side of my face- cancer of the parotid gland. An aggressive and rare cancer that had come back three times.

It was the morning of October 14, 2015, I got up early to get ready for work. I touched one of the tumors and it began to bleed non-stop. I woke up my daughter and told her we needed to go to the emergency room. As long as I applied a tremendous amount of pressure to the tumor it would stop bleeding. The moment I took the pressure off, the bleeding would start again.

Once we got to the ER department, they took me right back. I had more than one towel full of blood. The ER doctor that was assigned to me could not get the bleeding to stop unless he applied pressure to the tumor, and by now it was becoming very painful. The ER doctor decided to call a friend who was a surgical oncologist. She had just moved here from the East Coast from a major and well-respected cancer center. He was certain she would know what to do.

Dr. Sara came into my room and tried to look at the tumors, but when the pressure was taken off, the bleeding was horrible. I was losing so much blood. By then, all three of my older children had joined me in the emergency room, visibly shaken and filled with fear. As a mom to four kids and single, I was the one who always had taken care of everything. I was helpless. No one, including the surgical oncologist, seemed to know what to do. My kids were crying, I was crying… At that moment, everything felt impossible. At one moment, with great fear in her eyes, she expressed her concern that I might start bleeding uncontrollably right there and then. I will never forget that moment, the first time within 24 hours that I would face death head-on.

Dr. Sara needed to get me to another fairly new hospital, where they did an embolization surgery. It involved going through the groin and putting the matter into the blood vessels leading to the face to stop the flow of blood. I was transported to the hospital, where I was given several blood transfusions and put on a ventilator before surgery.

After surgery, I woke up in the ICU on a ventilator. The surgical oncologist had saved my life. However, there were still tumors to deal with. Never in my wildest dreams would I ever have thought that I would wake up in ICU on a ventilator. Or at that moment, the direction of my life would change forever. Now I vaguely remember why they put me on a ventilator. It was because I was very weak and would not have been able to make it through the embolization surgery having to breathe on my own.

After I got stronger, the surgical oncologist said we would need to get me as strong as possible - but we only had a short time.

She was going to perform a 15-hour surgery to remove the tumors- one was the size of a tangerine and the other was of a grapefruit size. She was also going to remove my cheek and jawbones and go into my throat. She said I would probably be on a feeding tube for the rest of my life. She also said I would have 5-7 additional surgeries for reconstruction and I would have to have radiation therapy as well.

She did her best to put a lot of fear into me. However, I was not afraid and I knew there was a better way. She wanted to cut the left side of my face off.

She explained to me that I didn't have a lot of time, the embolization surgery would only last a short time and if the tumors started bleeding again I wouldn't be so lucky. At this point, I had been fighting cancer for two years and had met with over 10 oncologists all over the country. The majority of people trust doctors and would have gone through with the surgery. If I had made it through the series of surgeries, I would have been deformed, on a feeding tube for life and my smile would have been taken away. Not a life I wanted to live!

Yes, I had a lot of fear, however, I became my advocate, plus I had my unrelenting faith. I started to research every possible option. And I knew I didn't have a lot of time; the tumors were getting larger every day.

I refused the series of surgeries. I knew that even if I even made it through all of the surgeries, which I now know I would not have, I would have lost something I knew was one of my superpowers- my smile. But how could I trust the unknown and let go believing everything would be okay when I had lived my entire life being in total control and living in fear?

How I Found a Better Way
Over the next couple of months, I searched to find the right solutions to help with my cancer. What felt like a miracle was the oncology team in my backyard who became my partners in becoming cancer free.

The hardest thing about my treatments was the isolation and pain. I was so lonesome. My kids were around but they worked and had their own lives. My youngest son was only 13 and I didn't want him to see me in so much pain, thus he spent a lot more time with his dad, my ex-husband.

Did I contemplate suicide, yes? I had no idea if this third treatment program would work. And I was tired of fighting. I was going on three years of struggling with cancer. I was exhausted. I went through 37 radiation treatments and drove myself to every treatment. I underwent brachytherapy which was so painful. After a week of radiation and hypothermia, I could barely get off the couch let alone drive myself forty-five minutes each way to radiation.

I began to pray a lot. I began to meditate a lot. I researched the power of meditation and controlling your mind and the effect the mind had on the body. I began to understand the power of my mind and how my mind, the emotion of fear, caused my cancer, and how changing my mindset could cure me.

I saw the results of feeling happy, typically this was when my oldest daughter brought my grandkids to see me, and had on my physical well-being. I had much less pain and anxiety when I was able to interact with my grandkids. Loneliness was killing me, not cancer. And the feelings of joy and love, when I spent time with my kids and grandkids, were healing me.

Loneliness isn't feeling like you don't know anybody. It's feeling like nobody could ever really know you. Becoming someone worth knowing requires reciprocity and vulnerability. It requires an actual investment of emotional capital into people you wish to know. And there's only a fixed amount allotted for distribution, in a deeper way than taking 15 seconds to "like" and comment, anyway.

Intimacy requires the courage to make enemies as easily as we make friends and watch the world dare to stand with us. You are never going to be happy with what you get unless you're happy with what you have. The fact remains that we have to learn to love ourselves and find inner peace. It comes down to connecting with self and our higher power especially now during these extremely isolating times.

Social integration and connecting with a stranger are top predictors of longevity. I was pretty disconnected before cancer, however during my cancer journey, I became isolated and alone. Only my kids could see me, I was ashamed of the image in the mirror, thus I rarely looked at myself in the mirror. Did you know a good number of individuals in this world can't look at themselves in the mirror?

I had no idea what it meant to live life with an open heart; to trust in myself; to speak my truth; to love all the weird, crazy, uniqueness I possessed, but I mostly hide from the world. I had no idea how to genuinely connect with people, especially random strangers.

Little did I know these tumors and the shame and guilt which had always been there, would begin my path inward. A journey to find the real me. My inner beauty, strength, and RADICAL SELF LOVE. Cancer became my greatest teacher

Blessings
"More smiling, less worrying. More compassion, less judgment. More blessed, less stressed. More love, less hate." ~ Roy T. Bennett

Do you feel blessed? Do you count your blessings or focus on all the challenging or bad things that are happening in your life? Individuals who practice gratitude experience a wide range of life-boosting changes. They're more satisfied, experience lower stress and depression levels, and are happier people overall. Isn't that reason enough to count your blessings more often? Then why do we spend so much time focusing on the challenges and not our blessings? Also, the saying 'misery loves company' seems to be true. Why is that?

I am a very compassionate, caring individual and I help a lot of individuals who are suffering, especially with cancer. However, I have learned that staying in misery and supporting others in staying in their misery will only create more misery, poor mental and physical health, and a lot less abundance. We have all had challenges and the work is all around feeling the feelings when there is a challenge, setback, etc., but not wallowing in the emotions for a long period.

It is not possible to change your future if you are always thinking about all the past hurts, disappointments, setbacks, challenges, heartbreaks, etc. It is just not possible to create a beautiful future if you are living in the past. Do your best to let it all go and count your blessings.

Today I am blessed and feel grateful for all the beautiful people in my life who love and care for me, who say it, show it, and lift me! I feel so blessed to be able to write, my lifelong dream; to have a strong, healthy, lean body, especially after almost losing my life to cancer; to have a compassionate, loving, giving heart that I open to give and receive love from moment to moment; and to be alive and that everyone in my inner circle is healthy and thriving.

I could go on and on with all of my blessings. Can you? Try counting your blessings instead of your problems and watch your world transform into something beautiful. And always believe in miracles, they happen in a second!

Breathe in the Power of Love ❤️
"Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier ~ Mother Teresa

The above quote became my mantra quite some time ago. I do my best to live it every day. It is wrapped around the work I do and what I believe is my purpose on this earth: to bring out the MAGIC AND LOVE in every individual I encounter- their true essence.

This doesn't mean I do not get frustrated with people at times. However, if I feel I have to react negatively to someone or some situation, I do it alone, I give myself a "time out." I center

myself and remember I am responsible for my emotions, feelings, and reality. And all that matters is LOVE. And trust me, sometimes these time-outs last a long time, LOL.

This is especially true in close and intimate relationships. Of course, you are going to get frustrated, angry, disappointed, etc., with those you have an intimate relationship with. However, if you can first remember that the foundation of your relationship is one of LOVE, TRUST, and RESPECT, you are much more likely to give yourself a "time out" before you react and respond.

When I go inward and focus on my heart and breathe in, I feel joy, love, and peace. And trust me people are very attracted to those beautiful emotions. It becomes your foundation and you will hold the belief that together you can work out any challenge.

I meditate every day and connect with my higher power, which is PURE LOVE and Oneness, plus magic will begin to shine and so will your life.

Try to breathe in the power of love, especially when you feel frustrated with someone or something.

The power of vulnerably
Vulnerable - adjective. Exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.

Vulnerability is something most of us avoid because we fear being judged, hurt, or experiencing a deep fear of failure. We have been conditioned and taught that if you are vulnerable you will have to put yourself in a position that could harm you in some way.

However, vulnerability does not have to be a negative thing. There is tremendous power in being vulnerable. Did you know that one of the qualities of an effective and successful leader is vulnerability? To be vulnerable means to put yourself out there and be open to possibilities and opportunities. Fear is only a temporary thing constructed by a negative association with the event or activity. So, if you have fear around something in your past that is stopping you from being vulnerable then it is time to let it go. It is impossible to create a new future, the life of your dreams if you are living in the past. Being vulnerable has a great deal to do with creating a new future, mostly because it is something so many of us are afraid to do! And if you are not living the life of your dreams in any way, what do you have to lose by being more vulnerable?

What are the benefits of being vulnerable?
The only way to be authentic is to be vulnerable - Authenticity means having the courage to be emotionally honest and to let ourselves be vulnerable. How many emotionally honest people do you know? We all want to find authentic individuals, yet how much are we willing to be authentic? You attract who you are.

Being vulnerable empowers us to tell our story. We all have vulnerable stories. Stories we are afraid to share for fear of being judged. However, when we share our narratives, we are permitting others to do the same. I know this from being a survivor of sexual assault. To date, I have shared my story with thousands of victims of violent sexual assault, through writing and in person. The number of individuals, men, and women who have come forward and told me, and others, their stories of being sexually assaulted is amazing- many for the first time. Do you know how empowering and freeing this is for someone?

The vulnerability allows us to develop deeper connections. We are all struggling right now with the connection. However, connecting with a random stranger or your close network of individuals who love you, especially your significant other, is the predictor of longevity. Connection saves lives.

This past summer, my oldest daughter came home after picking her kids up from school to find crime scene tape, police cars, and fire trucks surrounding her neighbor's home. Yesterday, she found out that the 17-year-old boy who lived there had hung himself in the backyard. He had younger brothers.

Do you think this young man would be here today if he felt safe being vulnerable? Suicide is at an all-time high among our youth and the lack of connection is one of the main reasons. And we can't expect our children to be vulnerable if we are not setting an example of vulnerability. How many of us are vulnerable enough to present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world? To a world that expects us to be perfect! Certainly, the power comes when all those we surround ourselves with are these types of people, nonjudgmental and accepting. Vulnerability is about being genuine and showing up even if it might hurt. Because that's the only way to live life to the fullest and develop real, honest, and loving relationships.

Early on in life, I made the difficult decision to hide my scars. I was not going to be viewed as weak under any circumstances. I guess this worked until the day I could no longer hide my scars. My cancer was of the parotid gland- a gland right by your ear. Multiple surgeries and radiation left me with scars on the side of my face and neck- scars I cannot hide.

In the beginning, I felt extreme shame and embarrassment. Thus, I isolated myself. That isolation led to depression and suicidal thoughts, plus I had a tremendous amount of doubt about whether I could ever find a happy, fulfilling life. Especially if I could ever find true love. I felt unlovable, who was going to love me with all these visible scars?

I knew I could have surgery to repair all the damage - or I could learn to love myself and my scars. I selected to dive into self-love, and not develop self-love but rather RADICAL SELF-LOVE. A lot went into this journey including facing my fears to be loved and a period of the night of the world. However, one thing I found to be of utmost importance and so essential is COURAGE.

Courage to be vulnerable, and genuine, and embrace my uniqueness with love and joy. After all, I guarantee no one is walking this earth with the same outwardly scars. Where are your scars and do you hide them?

1. **Stop waiting to be happy** - Why are you waiting for something external to happen before you can feel happy? Find your happiness now. Stop waiting for something "to happen" to find happiness and JOY.
2. **Make happiness a part of your life right now** - Find all the beautiful reasons to be happy and JOYFUL.
3. **Make self-care part of your routine** - Every day do something good for you! Find something that brings you JOY and do it! Perhaps it's going for a walk and appreciating nature. Or listening to music and dancing. Or talking in a bubble bath. Put yourself first for a portion of your day.
4. **Stop worrying** - All the worrying in the world will not change one thing in your life. I was a warrior because my parents were warriors. I had to let that shit go!!!

5. **Appreciate the small things in your life** - Notice the small things in your life that are beautiful, wonderful, and JOYFUL. Perhaps it's the smiles you receive when you smile.
6. **Surround yourself with positive and good people who love you** - This is so important. Let go of anyone who is negative in your life and doesn't want the best for you. Your circle may become small but it will be powerful.
7. **Laugh more** - YES laugh as much as you possibly can. The health benefits of laughter are enormous!
8. **Love more** - You knew this was coming. OPEN YOUR HEART and LOVE MORE. Let down the walls and watch your world change.
9. **Plan out your happiness** - Do not let work take over your life. I have found and I teach individuals how to work less and make more money. It works!
10. **Be nicer to yourself** - See #3 - practice self-care 😎
11. **BE GRATEFUL** - Gratitude changes everything. Feel it, embrace it, and express gratitude every moment you possibly can.

Unlocking Your Child's Potential: A Parent's Guide to Parenting by Design

Karen Wagnon
Founder, Teaching Our Youth

Introduction to Parenting by Design

Parenting is a challenging and rewarding journey that requires a lot of time, patience, and effort. As parents, we want to do our best to ensure that our children grow up to be happy, healthy, and successful individuals. However, the task of parenting can be overwhelming, especially when we don't understand our children's unique personality styles.

The DISC model of human behavior is a useful tool for understanding the four primary personality styles: Dominant, Inspiring, Supportive, and Cautious.

Dominant individuals are driven, goal-oriented, and assertive. They are natural leaders who thrive on challenges and enjoy taking risks. Children with dominant personality styles may be competitive, independent, and ambitious. They may be less interested in following rules and may resist authority.

Inspiring individuals are enthusiastic, outgoing, and social. They are natural communicators who enjoy connecting with others and building relationships. Children with inspiring personality styles may be creative, expressive, and charismatic. They may enjoy being the center of attention and may be less interested in routine tasks.

Supportive individuals are warm, nurturing, and empathetic. They are natural caretakers who enjoy helping others and providing emotional support. Children with supportive personality styles may be cooperative, sensitive, and loyal. They may prioritize harmony and may avoid conflict.

Cautious individuals are analytical, detail-oriented, and methodical. They are natural problem-solvers who enjoy analyzing data and making informed decisions. Children with cautious personality styles may be thoughtful, precise, and cautious. They may prefer structured environments and may be less comfortable with change.

Remember, each personality style has its unique strengths and weaknesses, and understanding them can help parents tailor their parenting style to their child's needs. By understanding our children's personality styles, we can communicate more effectively, set appropriate boundaries, and tailor our parenting style to meet their needs

Understanding Personality Styles

The Dominant Personality Style

Individuals with a dominant personality style are driven, goal-oriented, and assertive. They are natural leaders who thrive on challenges and enjoy taking risks. Children with dominant personality styles may be competitive, independent, and ambitious. They may be less interested in following rules and may resist authority.

Dominant individuals tend to be direct and assertive in their communication. They speak their minds and are not afraid to take charge of a situation.

As a parent, it's essential to recognize that your dominant child may need to be given more choices and independence to thrive. Providing them with opportunities to take on leadership roles and make decisions can help them develop their strengths.

The Inspiring Personality Style

Individuals with an inspiring personality style are enthusiastic, outgoing, and social. They are natural communicators who enjoy connecting with others and building relationships. Children with inspiring personality styles may be creative, expressive, and charismatic. They may enjoy being the center of attention and may be less interested in routine tasks.

Inspiring individuals tend to be expressive and emotional in their communication. They enjoy telling stories and connecting with others on an emotional level.

As a parent, it's essential to recognize that your inspiring child may need opportunities to express themselves creatively and interact with others. Encouraging them to participate in social activities, such as sports, can help them develop their strengths.

The Supportive Personality Style

Individuals with a supportive personality style are warm, nurturing, and empathetic. They are natural caretakers who enjoy helping others and providing emotional support. Children with supportive personality styles may be cooperative, sensitive, and loyal. They may prioritize harmony and may avoid conflict.

Supportive individuals tend to be patient and caring in their communication. They are good listeners and enjoy providing emotional support to others.

As a parent, it's essential to recognize that your supportive child may need opportunities to show compassion and kindness towards others. Encouraging them to volunteer or participate in community service can help them develop their strengths.

The Cautious Personality Style

Individuals with a cautious personality style are analytical, detail-oriented, and methodical. They are natural problem-solvers who enjoy analyzing data and making informed decisions. Children with cautious personality styles may be thoughtful, precise, and cautious. They may prefer structured environments and may be less comfortable with change.

Cautious individuals tend to be precise and methodical in their communication. They enjoy analyzing information and making informed decisions.

As a parent, it's essential to recognize that your cautious child may need opportunities to use their analytical skills and problem-solving abilities. Encouraging them to engage in activities that require critical thinking and analysis, such as puzzles or math games, can help them develop their strengths.

Understanding your child's personality style can help you tailor your parenting style to their needs. By recognizing your child's strengths and weaknesses, you can provide them with opportunities to develop their skills and interests with true spirit.

Parenting Styles
Every parent has a unique parenting style that is influenced by their personality and life experiences. Let's explore how personality styles influence different parenting styles.

The Dominant Parenting Style
Parents with a dominant personality style tend to be strong-willed and assertive. They are often confident and decisive, and they value control and power. As a result, parents with a dominant personality style may have an authoritarian parenting style.

Authoritarian parents are strict and often use harsh discipline. They may have high expectations for their children and enforce strict rules and boundaries. While this parenting style can lead to well-behaved children, it can also lead to a lack of independence and creativity or even rebellion in strong-willed children.

The Inspiring Parenting Style
Parents with an inspiring personality style are outgoing and enthusiastic. They often value creativity and spontaneity and may have a permissive parenting style.

Permissive parents are nurturing and warm, but they may lack boundaries and discipline. They may allow their children to make their own decisions and may not enforce rules consistently. While this parenting style can lead to close parent-child relationships, it can also lead to children who lack structure and responsibility.

The Supportive Parenting Style
Parents with a supportive personality style are caring and empathetic. They often value relationships and may have an authoritative parenting style.

Authoritative parents are warm and nurturing, but they also need to enforce rules and boundaries. This is not always easy since they do not like conflict. They can provide guidance and support for their children while also allowing for independence and autonomy. This parenting style can lead to well-adjusted children who are responsible and independent.

The Cautious Parenting Style
Parents with a cautious personality style are detail-oriented and analytical. They often value order and structure and may have a perfectionist parenting style.

Cautious parents have clear rules and expectations for their children and may provide a lot of guidance and structure. While this parenting style can lead to organized and responsible children, it can also lead to children who are anxious or overly reliant on their parents.

How Your Personality Influences Your Parenting Style
Your personality style can greatly influence your parenting style. Understanding your personality and how it impacts your parenting can help you make informed decisions about how to raise your children.

For example, if you have a dominant personality style, you may need to consciously work to provide your children with a sense of autonomy and independence while still maintaining rules and boundaries. Similarly, if you have a cautious personality style, you may need to be aware of the potential for your children to feel as though they are not good enough.

Every parent has a unique parenting style that is influenced by their personality and life experiences. Understanding your personality and how it impacts your parenting style can help you make informed decisions about how to raise your children. By finding the right balance between discipline and nurturing, you can create a positive and nurturing environment for your child to thrive as you adapt to parent by design [Click Here for more information on Personality Assessments].

Communication in Parenting

Effective communication is crucial in building strong relationships with your children. However, different personality styles may require different communication strategies. Let's explore effective communication strategies for each personality style.

Communication with Dominant Personality Styles

When communicating with dominant children, it's essential to be direct and assertive. They value action and results, so avoid long explanations or beating around the bush. Instead, focus on the facts and provide clear expectations. Use a confident tone and avoid showing indecisiveness or uncertainty.

It's also essential to provide them with opportunities to take on leadership roles through volunteer opportunities. Encourage them to express their opinions and ideas, and allow them to have some control over their lives. So allow them to make some decisions on their own. By doing so, you are helping them develop their strengths and providing them with a sense of empowerment.

Communication with Inspiring Personality Styles

When communicating with inspiring children, it's important to be expressive and emotional. They value relationships and social connections, so avoid being overly critical or harsh. Instead, provide positive feedback and encouragement. Use a friendly tone and try to connect with them on an emotional level.

It's also essential to provide them with opportunities to express themselves creatively and interact with others. Encourage them to participate in social activities, such as sports, and show interest in their interests. By doing so, you are helping them develop their strengths and providing them with a sense of validation.

Communication with Supportive Personality Styles

When communicating with supportive children, it's essential to be patient and empathetic. They value harmony and emotional support, so avoid being too critical or demanding. Instead, provide emotional support and encouragement. Use a caring tone and show appreciation for their efforts. Kind, calm conversational tones work best. Affirm them on the good decisions they make and they care for others.

It's also essential to provide them with opportunities to show their compassion and kindness towards others. Encourage them to volunteer or participate in community service, and show interest in their personal lives. By doing so, you are helping them develop their strengths and providing them with a sense of fulfillment.

Communication with Cautious Personality Styles

When communicating with cautious children, it's important to be precise and informative. They value accuracy and logical reasoning, so avoid being too emotional or impulsive. Instead,

provide clear explanations and avoid ambiguity or vagueness. Use a confident tone and show respect for their analytical skills.

It's also essential to provide them with opportunities to use their analytical skills and problem-solving abilities. Encourage them to engage in activities that require critical thinking and analysis, such as puzzles or math games. By doing so, you are helping them develop their strengths and providing them with a sense of intellectual fulfillment.

Effective communication is key to building strong relationships with your children. By understanding their personality styles and tailoring your communication strategies to their needs, you can foster a positive and nurturing environment in which they can thrive. In the next chapter, we will explore how to set and maintain boundaries with your children.

Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

As a parent, setting and maintaining boundaries is essential for your child's growth and development. Boundaries create guidelines and limits and provide a sense of structure and safety. Boundaries also help children understand the expectations for their behavior. Let's explore effective strategies for setting and maintaining boundaries with your children.

Understand Your Boundaries

Before you can effectively set boundaries for your children, it's important to understand your expectations and boundaries. Take some time to reflect on what behaviors and situations are acceptable to you and what is not. Understanding your boundaries will help you communicate them more clearly to your children.

Be Clear and Consistent

When setting boundaries, it's important to be clear and consistent. Make sure your child knows what is expected of them and the consequences for crossing those boundaries. Use clear language and avoid vague or ambiguous statements.

Consistency is also key. If you let a behavior slide one day and then punish it the next, your child will become confused and unsure of what is expected of them. Stick to your boundaries and the consequences for crossing them, even if it's inconvenient or uncomfortable for you.

Provide a Reasonable Amount of Autonomy

While boundaries are important, it's also essential to provide your child with a reasonable amount of autonomy. This means giving them some control over their lives and allowing them to make their own decisions within the boundaries you've set. Also allow them to experience the consequences of poor choices, and be empathetic. Help them to discover what may have worked better and allow them to solve their problems with your support and encouragement. This will empower them to believe they have what it takes to overcome any challenges they encounter.

The Importance of the Family Meeting to Set Boundaries and Consequences

Family meetings provide an open space to express thoughts and feelings about household rules and boundaries. It allows each family member to feel seen, heard, and understood, which strengthens the family bond and promotes a positive family dynamic.

Open the meeting by expressing concerns over the conflicts you have been experiencing. Encourage your child to share their thoughts and feelings about how they feel you can work

together to resolve the issue.

I encourage parents to give their children the opportunity to share their ideas first. This allows them to feel seen and heard. If they do not have a resolution, ask permission to share a couple of suggestions. "Would I be able to make a suggestion?" When they say, "yes" this opens the door for them to receive what you have to say. Most parents set up a family meeting to "tell" their children what needs to change, only to be met with resistance.

After you have agreed upon the boundaries and expectations we need to move to the consequences if the new boundary is violated. Ask the child what they feel would be an appropriate consequence, once again giving them a voice. Make sure each family member understands the boundaries and consequences and agrees to follow them.

In addition to fostering open communication and understanding, family meetings also promote accountability and responsibility. When everyone is involved in creating the household rules and consequences, they are more likely to take ownership of their actions and adhere to the rules.

Holding a collaborative family meeting to communicate boundaries and consequences is an effective strategy for promoting healthy communication, accountability, and responsibility within your family. It allows each family member to feel heard, understood, and involved in the decision-making process, which can strengthen family bonds and promote a positive family dynamic.

Use Positive Reinforcement
When your child respects your boundaries, use positive reinforcement to encourage their good behavior. Praising your child when they follow the rules will reinforce their positive behavior and encourage them to continue doing so. For example, you can thank them for cleaning up the toys before dinner or coming home on time based on an agreed curfew.

Avoid Using Physical Punishment
Physical punishment is not an effective way to set or maintain boundaries. It can lead to physical harm and emotional trauma and can damage the parent-child relationship. Instead, focus on clear communication and positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior.

Setting and maintaining boundaries is essential for your child's growth and development. By understanding your boundaries, being clear and consistent, providing a reasonable amount of autonomy, encouraging open communication, using positive reinforcement, and avoiding physical punishment, you can create a positive and nurturing environment for your child to thrive.

The Child Wants to be Seen, Heard, and Understood
Children have an innate desire to be seen, heard, and understood. Children who feel seen, heard, and understood are more likely to develop healthy self-esteem, emotional regulation skills, and positive relationships with others. When children feel that their feelings and thoughts are valued and respected, they are more likely to feel secure and confident in themselves. On the other hand, when children feel ignored or dismissed, they may develop a sense of inadequacy or low self-worth. This can lead to emotional and behavioral difficulties, including anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

As parents, it's our responsibility to meet our child's emotional needs and create a supportive and loving environment that fosters healthy development.

Strategies for Meeting Your Child's Emotional Needs
So, how can we meet our child's emotional needs and create a supportive and nurturing environment? Each of the personalities has internal emotional needs. When these needs are not met we tend to experience disruptive behaviors. Here are some strategies that can help:

Active Listening - Take the time to listen to your child without judgment or interruption. Show empathy and validate their feelings and thoughts.

Positive Reinforcement and Affirmations - Celebrate your child's achievements and efforts, no matter how small. This can help build their self-esteem and confidence. Also affirm them for who they are, not just what they do. This will speak to their personality strengths. Click Here for a free PDF with 20 Affirming Word Statements based on Personality Style

Open Communication - Encourage your child to express themselves openly and honestly. Create a safe and non-judgmental environment where they can share their thoughts and feelings without fear of criticism. I call it the "no judgment zone". Do not react, just listen and ask questions to better understand.

Respect Boundaries - Children have their own boundaries and personal space, and it's important to respect these. Encourage your child to express their boundaries and honor them.

Building Trust and Connection with Your Child
Building trust and connection with your child is crucial for meeting their emotional needs. Trust can be built by being consistent, reliable, and following through on your commitments. Connection can be built by spending quality time with your child, doing activities that they enjoy, and showing interest in their lives.

Meeting our child's emotional needs is a critical aspect of parenting. By providing emotional support, validation, and empathy, we can create a nurturing and supportive environment that fosters healthy development. Active listening, positive reinforcement, open communication, and respect for boundaries are all strategies that can help meet our child's emotional needs. Building trust and connection with our children is also essential for their emotional well-being. Remember, every child is unique, and there is no one right way to parent. But with empathy, understanding, and love, we can all help our children feel seen, heard, and understood.

As we dig deeper into the art of parenting by design, it's crucial to recognize that parenting is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Every child and parent has a unique personality style, with varying needs and strengths that require tailored attention.

Framework to Parent by Design

Becoming Aware of Personalities - Yours and Your Child's
The first step in effective parenting is to become aware of your personality style and your child's. By understanding your strengths and challenges, you can better recognize areas where you may need to adapt your parenting style to meet your child's needs. Additionally, by understanding your child's personality style, you can gain valuable insight into their unique strengths and challenges and tailor your interactions accordingly.

Adapt Your Interactions to Meet the Internal Emotional Needs
Once you have identified your child's personality style, it's essential to adapt your interactions to meet their internal emotional needs. For example, if your child has a supportive personality style, they may thrive on positive affirmation and appreciation. On the other hand, if your child has a cautious personality style, they may benefit from clear boundaries and structure to help them feel safe and secure.

Apply the Right Strategies
Effective parenting strategies are not one-size-fits-all. Instead, it's crucial to apply the right strategies that are tailored to your child's personality style and individual needs. For example, if your child is struggling with a particular subject in school, you may use positive reinforcement and encouragement to help build their confidence and motivation. Alternatively, if your child is facing a challenging situation, you may teach them problem-solving skills to help them develop their critical thinking and creativity.

Parenting is Not a One-Size-Fits-All Approach
Every child is unique. As a parent, it's essential to recognize that effective parenting is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, we must adapt our interactions and apply the right strategies to meet our child's individual needs, personality styles, and challenges.

The Parenting Blueprint, A Parenting by Design
Parenting by Design means taking a proactive approach to parenting and tailoring your interactions and strategies to meet your child's unique needs. By becoming aware of your and your child's personality styles, adapting your interactions to meet their internal emotional needs, and applying the right strategies, you can become an effective parent and support your child's growth and development.

By becoming aware of personalities, adapting interactions, applying the right strategies, and parenting by design, we can support our children's growth and development and become effective parents. Remember, parenting is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and every child requires tailored attention to thrive to be the best they can be according to their design.

Instructional Leadership

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The education system is a massive force providing an array of opportunities for students and families every day. The number of services being offered is unbelievable! Beyond core offerings of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies, education offers programs to students that focus on, not just academic intellect, but student intellectual abilities that surface through their talents and interests. The system realizes not all students are driven by core academics and may need additional skills to be able to participate in life after school. The objective to instill character, boldness, and confidence to make well-rounded, productive citizens is well noted in the curriculum provided to our children.

United States public schools host programs and initiatives to prepare college and career-ready students. They include programs such as S.T.E.A.M. (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics), C.T.E. (Career and Technical Education), JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp), advanced academics to receive early college credits, athletics, band, and an array of clubs and organizations customized according to the culture of the school. Students can graduate from a K-12 institution and walk right into a career as a nursing assistant, or work with basic-level coding, auto mechanics, welding, and culinary arts. Students are empowered to use these skills to go on and make more than a decent living, sometimes an even better living than their instructors. It is even possible for students to enter into their university experience with two years of college credits, allowing them to graduate early and pursue their adult plans at an earlier age than originally intended.

So many opportunities and pathways of focus exist within our massive, complex education system. The excessive opportunities have convinced our profession to believe busy motion and numerous opportunities and initiatives are part of the purpose of our establishment. Instead of adding an expanded curriculum to improve our system of learning, we are adding to our curriculum in *hopes* that students will find us interesting, or in *hopes* that a student catches on to any talent and is successful before leaving our schools. We have forgotten that accuracy, mastery, and relevance are what make us interesting. When what we teach is relevant, students will not be able to resist what we have to offer - it doesn't matter the course.

We have forgotten our job is about learning. Our every intention is centered around learning. Like doctors practicing medicine with an outcome of health, we are indeed practicing education with an expected outcome of learning. Our true existence as an establishment is *learning* - nothing else. When this settles into the minds of our school leaders and decision-makers, we will be a more productive industry.

The Invisible War
I remember working as a school administrator in a high-needs school. My supervisor at the time compartmentalized our roles to ensure laser focus and quality of work. Of course, my assigned role was the instructional administrator and sometimes he even referred to me as the Dean of Instruction or the assistant principal over instruction. I LOVED the role I played on our team! I think it was one of the best teams for which I have ever worked. I envisioned myself as being tasked with putting together a large, complex puzzle that, unfortunately, had

missing pieces. While everyone else was set on a general description of student achievement, I always unpacked that phrase in my mind.

I began organizing those puzzle pieces by researching answers to the following questions:
- What kind of students are we serving?
- What kind of parental support does the school have?
- What is the capacity of the teachers with which we will be working?
- Are there any micro/macro-political delays I need to know about?
- What quantitative data is available for the students/teachers?
- What qualitative data is accessible regarding my students/teachers?
- Who is the board member for our school?
- How much money do we have?
- How much money do we have access to?
- Is there extra money anywhere?
- What do I need to do to acquire extra money?

The list could go on, but essentially, I studied my people until I was able to create an instructional pathway that would lead us to our goal, and as comfortably as possible. If that task required me to create the missing pieces to our puzzle, then I did that as well.

As I became engrossed in my work, I would sometimes make statements like, "If we can ensure quality Tier I instruction, then the number of disciplinary incidents will decrease." I spent quite a bit of time in the classrooms. So, I understood and tried to communicate the correlation I saw between behavior and the classroom. I intended to explain disciplinary matters be a symptom of a much larger issue that was happening in the school.

Think of a scenario similar to a person having shortness of breath after walking 10 steps. Even without a medical degree, one could see this is not the standard for good health and would want to position the person to receive a more in-depth analysis. Once analysis is complete, we determine there is a growing issue with the person's heart. The shortness of breath was only a symptom of the larger issue. The larger, real issue is the heart.

Well, think of heightened disciplinary issues in the school as the "symptom" and Tier I instruction as "the heart." There was a lack of classroom management within the classrooms, which resulted from a lack of pedagogical ability on the part of the teacher, most of the time. Intentional, added instructional support would be directly correlated to a decrease in classroom disciplinary incidents, which would result in decreased overall school disciplinary incidents.

I had no idea my explanation of the anatomy of school chaos was controversial. What I thought I communicated was that our school discipline exists, because our teachers need more monitoring and development - an action that can only improve when the school administrators lean into the instruction on the campus. However, I later realized my perception was not the only perspective being processed. My colleagues, at the time, heard me differently. They were thinking in a more technical, short-term manner.

It was shared with me, if I ever wanted a job as a principal, I better learn how to control my school first. If the school could not be controlled, there was no way I would be able to execute the instruction needed for the school. Likewise, if a teacher is not able to control their class, they will not be able to teach anything. And I wholeheartedly agree with both statements. However, later, I came to understand my perspective was being communicated from an

instructional leadership perspective, which is a more aerial view of school leadership that focuses on *learning* and consist of 3 layers:

1. Operational Lens
2. Cultural Lens
3. Curriculum/Instructional Lens

These are the three areas of school leadership that exist on school campuses all over the world. They are also the three areas in which an invisible war exists. No one lens is more important than the other, but each lens consistently strives to prove its importance. So, they are often found working in isolation. When these leadership characteristics are executed in isolation from each other, we create schools that are imbalanced, unpredictable, and entangled in an educational version of Russian roulette - we never know which idea is going to be effective.

Three Layers of Instructional Leadership
Let's examine each lens included in operating as an instructional leader. As you read the text, ask yourself, "Am I an instructional leader?" Better yet, use this chapter as a study for your instructional teams and have your assigned instructional leadership team ask themselves, "Are *we,* instructional leaders?" Reflect on whether or not you are presenting yourselves as education practitioners possessing and effectively utilizing operational, cultural, and curriculum/instructional strengths to create, implement, and manage teaching and learning.

Do You Identify as an Operational Leader Only?

Layer 1: Operational
When colleagues major in using an operational lens, they are super focused on day-to-day operations within the school. They make sure we meet safety procedure requirements and ensure we have the resources and materials needed for classrooms. They are *aware* of the instructional experience for students but operate under the belief that if we do not immediately focus on addressing discipline for the school, we would have a catastrophe on our hands.

Operational colleagues approach fixing the school by starting with the flow of the building first. They think in detail about what the school looks like. You will find those colleagues spending a great deal of time thinking about whether or not the marque has been consistently changed, or organizing how and where the buses need to park to make sure traffic does not interfere with car riders. Operational colleagues are the ones that keep our calendars flowing and make sure the school is set up for all events. They are heavily engaged in those things that require more instinctive and concrete action. They have a personal commitment to making sure everything *looks* in order. They feel that order and structure in terms of how the building operates is the key to everything else happening in the building. Their paradigm is they are the heart of what happens in school. So, when comments are made making instruction the center of what happens on a day-to-day basis, there is an offense.

I feel there is an offense because operations administrators know that it takes time to understand instructions. It's abstract and not tangible. The results also take time and are solely based on how well students perform. There is no real structured, guaranteed process for student success. Some standard processes can be put in place for student success, but what happens when the structure you chose doesn't work? The operations person would have to have some academic creativity that would afford them to be able to pivot as student and teacher needs change. See,

operations will be able to complete a check list of implementations, but you need instructional prowess to be able to provide continual, successful *learning* management.

Seeing themselves as directly connected to instruction, student achievement, or accountability presents a challenge. For this reason, sometimes they are observed in meetings with the stance of a consultant. They sit quietly and listen for system issues, offering advice and suggestions as needed. Even their colleagues learn to only refer to operational administrators during meetings only when there are building issues that need to be addressed.

In my opinion, this is a total waste of time and human resources. As a system, we complain we need more help and more hands - especially when referring to high-needs schools. However, I would argue we do not appropriately use all of the human resources currently at our disposal.

Despite the opportunities for growth operations administrators may have, an exemplary quality is their ability to organize and structure. There is no question about whether or not the building will operate according to expected compliance. And they have always had great relationships with students, especially challenging students. I do believe this is priceless. They spend a great deal of time engaged in the discipline, which allows them to learn more about students consistently demonstrating at-risk behaviors. The constant interaction with students and parents empowers them to serve as gatekeepers of the families represented in schools.

When operational leaders organize and manage systems you will see an increase in student achievement almost immediately. More instructional time equals more learning time. However, over time, student learning eventually plateaus. The business of learning goes a bit deeper than simply fixing the master schedule, managing student behavior, or having all the tangible resources needed to safely execute a school event. When learning plateaus, school leadership will be charged with knowing why the learning is plateauing, and what is needed to fix it. Those answers come with much study, creativity, and a deep understanding of how learning works in a school building. Building an organization will only take the learning environment so far, and a compliant building doesn't mean there is student growth taking place.

Do You Identify as a Cultural Leader Only?

Layer 2: Cultural
Cultural colleagues are those that operate from more of an emotional perspective. Their main focus is on how everyone feels when they are in school. Emotional IQ is high. You will find these colleagues able to connect with anyone, and on any level. Always fully aware of the key people in their school building, they are often deemed as approachable - non-threatening.

Sometimes their strengths are demonstrated in their creative ability to organize and facilitate events and activities to bring people together. Leaders with a cultural lens are excellent at creating environments in which people can thrive. However, the efforts are simplified to a *"feel good"* moment, reduced to a matter of fun or engagement rather than being fun, engaging moments that <u>directly</u> contribute to an increase in student achievement. The question could arise, "How can a leader determine whether or not their student achievement efforts are *directly* or *indirectly* related to student progress?" Well, it is always a matter of intention.

Let's examine Positive Behavior Support systems (PBSS) being implemented within schools. An effort indirectly related to student achievement looks like a school administrator

implementing Positive Behavior Support systems, because they want to work to change student behaviors in a positive light. They want children to enjoy coming to school. This is being designed and implemented to create an atmosphere in which students will want to come to school. Over time, we will eventually begin to see the effects of that on student achievement. Contrary, implementing PBSS with intentions resembles reviewing the academic as well as the behavioral data before students even had an opportunity to demonstrate negative behaviors. A school leader whose intentions were to affect student achievement understood student needs when correlating student academic, infraction, and attendance data. As a result of studying the data, they intentionally chose PBSS to assist with the overall student achievement, while seeing the behavior as a barrier to student achievement. Behavior is not the focus; rather, student achievement takes precedence.

Hiring the right people for the work we do is a unique and important skill set. Regardless of your intention or the many obstacles you put in place, at the end of the day, the number of choices you can make remain the same - (1) you can hire the right person for the job, or (2) you can hire the wrong person for the job. Cultural leaders' ability to communicate and connect allows them to be able to "hire well", which leads to being surrounded by some of the greatest people one could ever meet. People love them and are willing to collaborate under their leadership.

Being a person with high emotional intelligence increases your chances of choosing the right person for the job, but does not eliminate hiring incompetence. However, when cultural leaders engage in the process of hiring without being crystal clear about the instructional needs of their campus, it leads to playing "Russian roulette" with hiring. The chances of you choosing incompetence are increased. And this is understandable because engaging in the hiring process without a clear understanding of your campus instructional needs means you're only hiring for culture, not based on the person's capacity and willingness to learn the job.

Have you ever been to a high-needs school in which the environment was amazing? Although the school may be known for its inability to obtain satisfactory student performance, the instructional leadership team is warm and inviting. The teachers love teaching there, and the students love being there. There is never a dull moment. You'll hear of many awards events, showcases, and seasonal events happening for the students. What's even better is most of the time these cultural leaders are very good at posting these positive happenings on their social media for the world to view.

As much as it pains me to say this, all of these things are smoke screens. The real meaning behind the smoke screens is usually one or both of these two thoughts:

Thought #1: "We want you to see all the positive things happening in our school so you don't spend considerable time focused on our student performance."
Thought #2: "While we're trying to figure out why our students are not performing, here are some positive moments we'd like to share with you."

The hope is that the public will be so mesmerized by student talent to the point they excuse the fact there are student achievement challenges.

Imbalance Cultural Leadership
Now, before you start throwing darts at me. Please know, I was this cultural leader in times past. As a new instructional leader of a predominantly minority high school, yielding a 9%

proficiency in Math and low 2-digit numbered proficiency in all other subject areas, I had no idea what to do at the time. It seemed every negative event taking place in and out of the school was somehow associated with our school. The press associated with our school was negative most of the time. What I did know was the students I served every day, regardless of their current situations, were talented. I thought, "If I could just get the public to see more positive things about my school, we could change the culture of the entire building and yield the positive results that we need."

So, I worked with our teachers to create an event called "The Academic Gallery Walk." Teachers were able to use their curriculum to create a life-size, interactive project with one of their classes. As a team, we called every single parent and invited them. We were able to publicize it in the newspaper, and we also sent elegant invitations to every person of status in our district. The buzz we were able to create was enormous. The school was used to receiving negative publicity, and no one was persuaded people would even attend.

On opening night, the crowd was ushered into the school by our school drumline, which was AMAZING. There were so many people in the building, I was truly overwhelmed with thanksgiving. I think I even cried once it was all over. We intentionally used students with behavioral challenges to be the escorts for the VIPs who were visiting our school. Why not? My cultural senses led me to believe those students with behavioral challenges had creative and leadership capabilities. If you can influence a group of students to go in the wrong direction, why can't the same skill be used to win over school board members?

The projects the teachers and students created were beyond words I could even imagine. Our U.S. History teacher collaborated with our Woodshop teacher to create a human timeline telling African Americans' story from slavery to freedom. Our Health Science teacher set up a before and after display of germs on our hands. An English teacher recreated their room to resemble a scene from Lord of the Flies, and the students shared about the book and why they chose the scene on display to use for the Academic Gallery Walk. I could go on. Just know the night was very special. And you know what? It did change the atmosphere of the school! We did have an opportunity to see our staff come together in a way I had never seen up until that point.

As a new instructional leader, I learned quite a bit about our teachers and students in the process as well. Believe me when I tell you it was great in every way, except documented student achievement. Back then, I didn't understand why we were not seeing the sustainable student gains we needed. I know now, it was because of an imbalanced cultural leadership approach.

Driven by Feelings…Not Data
Another area you may want to keep an eye on as it relates to cultural leadership is the inability to be driven by your data. When cultural leadership is appropriately used, it can be used to effectively communicate the varied changes schools have to make, as a result of the school data. However, when the cultural leader is driven by applause, or obsessed with what others will think, it makes it challenging for them to be able to make those hard decisions associated with data-driven work.

I remember working with a cultural leader that developed such an incredible relationship with their staff. They operated with an open-door policy, and everyone loved them. Well, by this time, I had just made the paradigm shift from being a "Dean of Instruction" to being an "Instructional Leader." In my data dive, I discovered we needed one of our experienced

teachers to be moved to a tested area content if we were going to have a chance at coming out of low-performing status during the current academic year.

After sharing the information with the principal, I approached the teacher about making the shift using data, questioning, and all the expert coaching techniques, I learned. When I was done with my pitch, the teacher replied to me, "Oh no. I will not be teaching the tested area course. I have put in my dues for many years, and earned the classes I have now." I didn't go back and forth with the teacher. After all, I had a conversation with the principal before even discussing the matter with the teacher. So, in my mind, all would be well, eventually.

Shortly after our conversation, the teacher spoke with the principal in my absence. By the time the principal and I spoke again, the principal decided in favor of the teacher using the same verbiage, "ABC brought her concerns to me, and I agree she has earned the classes she has now. Let's see if we can't use the teacher we currently have, or choose another teacher to put in that course." Two things happened here:

1. This principal, operating in his strength as a cultural leader, knew that before I even spoke with the teacher, there would probably be backlash from the teacher. He also knew what I was saying was correct. So, he used me for the backlash so his name would not be associated with the changes that needed to be made. This would keep him in a positive light, leaving me to bear the negative perception associated with instructional leadership.

2. The principal's imbalanced cultural leadership made it hard to be able to choose what was in the best interest of the students. Also, because he delegated instructional leadership to me, he did not have enough context about the data to be able to effectively communicate to the teacher the "why" behind the "what" we were doing. His desire to maintain likability led him to create an instructional environment in which everyone understood at the end of the day, we will do what *we* want to do regardless of the negative student consequence it may have. His addiction to applause kept him from being able to do what was right for students.

Reflect on some of the strategies you have used to increase student achievement. Are you a victim of imbalanced cultural leadership?

Do You Identify as a Curriculum & Instruction Leader Only?

Layer 3: Curriculum & Instruction
The curriculum and instruction (C & I) lens is my favorite instructional layer to discuss. In a circle of education professionals, this perspective can certainly present itself as instructional leadership. However, when executed in isolation, the C & I lens can be just as damaging as the operational or cultural lens.

Curricular colleagues are those colleagues who have a full understanding of the curriculum and know instructional strategies that should be used in the classroom. They are very well-researched and can communicate what *should be* done within the classroom. They stay current on the latest educational trends, case studies, books, and magazines. These colleagues are excellent at completing the district instructional checklist (e.g. walkthroughs per week, feedback, observations, planning teacher workday PDs, supplemental plans for students, etc.)

When it comes to being driven by data, curriculum, and instruction professionals are well ahead of their peers. They are the beacon of hope that can guide everyone into understanding exactly where students are, and how far they have to go. They don't pay attention to averages. The level of detail devoted to data empowers them to know, not only the students who have met local, state, and national requirements, but they also know the students who were close to meeting those requirements and are a whiz at creating learning plans for all of those students.

I am a huge fan of the tv series, *The Good Doctor*. It's a show about an autistic doctor, Sean, who has been allowed to practice medicine. The show highlights all the social challenges a person with autism would face in trying to endeavor in such a profession. It also takes its time to highlight the brilliant ways in which Sean solves the most complex of problems. At certain times in the show, we can peep through the window of Sean's mind when he is trying to figure out a medical challenge. All of a sudden, we start seeing x-ray images of the patient with a clear path of how the organ/s should be working and what is not working. All of these images are circling Sean's head as the camera gets a still shot of Sean thinking. I love this part because it is a definite depiction of a leader with a curriculum and instruction lens. We hear the problems of a school, we read the student data, and all of a sudden, ideas for solutions for students begin to appear. We also start thinking of how the school or system should work, and the ways to circumvent obstacles or challenges that are preventing us from executing the solution. It's so exciting!

The premise of this entire description is to assist you in understanding my conversation with colleagues, and the common misunderstandings that prevail during instructional leadership. In understanding the three paradigms (operations, culture, and curriculum and instruction), I realized there was an invisible war going on between the three paradigms. Each lens advocated for its importance. While the operational, cultural, and curricular lenses all make valuable contributions to the workings of the school, they only produce limited, *short*-term results.

A strong understanding of curriculum and instruction alone only addresses academics. It doesn't address the operational or cultural challenges that may occur from executing your intervention, strategy, or plan. There is often a disregard for important facts about your school such as high student and teacher absenteeism (operations and culture), teacher and student morale (culture), the ability to attract and retain talent (operations and culture), macropolitics (culture), micropolitics (culture), and basic human paradigm (culture). When creating an academic plan for our campuses, we do quickly think about these things throughout the day no matter what lens we are using. However, the difference between operating from an isolated lens and being an instructional leader is, again, the level of intentionality used when thinking of these things.

As an assistant principal, I remember reviewing data with my admin team and discovering a targeted list of students that, if provided additional Math support, would assist in tipping the scale in our Math department. Operating from a curriculum and instructional lens, it was simple for me. Let's just provide the students with the support that is needed. My principal and the rest of my team were taking their time to work on another way to support those students. They had taken into consideration teacher pay, school budget, teacher morale, human resource availability, and a myriad of other factors that I completely overlooked because I was only thinking about academic support.

So, instead of being patient and working with my team to consider all perspectives, I went ahead on my own to provide the students with the support they needed alone.

Dear Readers…I was tired.

I offered tutorial support to the students in addition to the administrative duties I had to provide. As school leaders, there are instances when we are required to wear multiple hats, particularly considering our recent experience with COVID. It is not uncommon for us to have to provide instructional support in the form of teaching in the classroom. However, that was not the case here.

I took the time to find out student schedules and attempted to provide students Math assistance during their lunch time. Listen, I had a system already prepared. I would radio to my colleagues the names of students I needed, and they were to send them to me from the cafeteria. How do you think that played out?

My colleagues informed the students, but some of them never made it to me. The type of student that needed this level of academic assistance was not the same type of student that would report to a room without supervision. So, some students came, other students came late, and the remaining students did not come at all. I was able to support a small number of students at best. My pride and I didn't want to fail. Therefore, I took it upon myself to travel to the cafeteria on my own and round up students. This did not work either. By the time I rounded up all the students, it was almost time for lunch to end.

A few things you should notice in the previous example. Aside from not taking into consideration my team's perspective, I missed the operational matters that accommodate the organization and structure associated with facilitating such a supplemental program. However, I could have discovered this lesson in a few minutes had I just honored the operational and cultural perspective present during our admin meeting.

I also missed the cultural lesson that was present. Because I thought I had all the answers, my colleagues didn't want to work with me. Let's just be honest. I dishonored the culture of my instructional leadership team. Instead of collaborating with my team to design a plan that fits the culture of the school, I disjoined myself to accomplish a goal designed with only curriculum and instructional information. I realize there are times when you have to go counter-culture to make improvements and changes in schools. However, over the years, I have discovered this does not have to be the blueprint for improvement.

A colleague and I discussed a leader extremely strong in understanding the curriculum. At the time, their peer was even in charge of all the learning that was to take place on their campus. My colleague was frustrated about the results her peer had for the current school year. With all the curriculum knowledge this peer had, there should have been more of an increase in student achievement for their campus than what they experienced. After listening to her concern, I inquired, "Is this peer strong in *curriculum* or strong in the area of *instructional leadership*?"

Yes, there is a difference. A common misconception when hearing the phrase "curriculum and instruction" is that the practitioner is strong in both curriculum *and *instruction. The phrase is rarely seen as two different words or even two different skills.

Having strength in the curriculum means the C & I designee is fluent in the ability to understand what is being taught and provide in-depth content knowledge support for teachers. Their expertise doesn't just lie in the content they taught when they were in the classroom. As long as they have access to the desired standards that need to be taught, they can download the

information, and effectively communicate it to others. These practitioners are masters of learning, a skill requiring time and patience. However, the execution of what they have learned suffers at times. Their talents hover in the realm of theory, leaving them baffled when plans don't work.

As for the *instructional* side of curriculum and instruction, it deals with the *way* the curriculum should be taught - how it should be delivered so that learning takes place. When a curriculum and instruction person is limited to the instructional side of their job, they can only provide you direction on instructional delivery. However, if campus improvement requires study in content outside of their comfort zone, these leaders struggle. Sometimes, they react by hiring or petitioning for another position to handle the task of digesting the curriculum and effectively communicating it to the staff. This action choice only poses a problem, if the managing leader does not know how to provide coaching support. Consequently, the campus/district will experience high turnover due to a lack of instructional leadership.

Are You Truly an Instructional Leader?

Now…Let's Talk Instructional Leadership

When a leader decides to become an instructional leader, they choose to engineer the entire learning experience within a school. Everything they do relates to the overall outcome needed to ensure students get the best education they need to be productive citizens. Nothing is left to chance. Everything is designed, communicated, and executed with fidelity - intentionality.

Instructional leadership is not operations, culture, *or* curriculum. It's all three of those leadership qualities working together to achieve the campus learning goal. Any of these characteristics operating in isolation is *instinctive* leadership with an understanding of how education works and what *should* happen, but it is not *strategic* leadership with a commitment to understanding, application, facilitation, and results.

Leaders operating heavily in the curriculum and/or instructional lens cannot be consumed with their curriculum agenda, but are unable to address disciplinary issues throughout the building. On the other hand, you can't consume yourself with a cultural lens where everyone is happy, the school looks good, and everyone knows what to say to sound instructional, but there are no results because there is no deep understanding of what needs to happen instructional. This is the equivalent of Math teachers being able to calculate to get the correct answer, but lacking the depth of content that keeps them from being able to provide understanding to others.

It is also unsuitable to have an isolated operational lens. Student behaviors may be addressed, but there is also an expectation for those leaders to anticipate the needs of the campus academic plan. We need you to study the school building is negatively reacting to in-school professional development, because there is no class coverage for teachers. Or you're incapable of having a data conversation regarding teacher and student attendance, how it impacts our learning goals and instructional solutions we can implement to correct the matter.

Instructional leadership requires constant studying, experimenting, and collaboration. This is not corporate leadership where the principal can go into an office and delegate without inspection or communication with an expectation for everyone to do their job. Corporate leaders can lead without getting in the weeds. However, when you are committed to providing

instructional leadership, you will get into the weeds and do the work along with your staff, if necessary. It requires explicit communication on the weight of the task ahead, and specific instructions on how we are going to get there. You have to be willing to take the long route because shortcuts surrounding student learning are rare.

All schools, but especially urban or high-needs schools must have instructional leaders at the helm of school transformation. Historically, transforming schools have been viewed as simply organizing the behavior within the building. However, instructional leadership not only works with their team to organize the school's behavioral concerns but is also able to diagnose and prescribe action for academic concerns.

Take differentiated instruction, for example. A practitioner could have a surface view, and begin researching professional development only associated with differentiated instruction. A true instructional leader, however, would take the time to slow down and figure out why multiple teachers are having such an issue with differentiated instruction. They would allow themselves an opportunity to discover the root cause of problems in differentiated instruction is an inability to collect, understand and/or respond to qualitative and quantitative data as it relates to the students they serve. This information empowers me to pivot professional development to better meet the needs of my teachers.

Carraway and Young (2015) stated, "...good schools have good principals, but high-performing schools have instructional leaders." Everyone wants to lead a school that can make great gains, and see student achievement. A wonder if those same practitioners are willing to transform into the type of leader required to see this change. Instructional leadership is required for change. Take some time to reflect on your leadership. Are you an instructional leader, or have you adopted one of the lenses as your school leadership style? Are you the *face* of your campus, or are you the face of instructional leadership? Do you, or others defer to someone else for instructional guidance? These are important reflections.Your answers are the difference between leading a "good school" or a "high-performing school.

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Lessons from Parenting and Unlearning the Gender Binary

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Speaking Out as Parent

Like many parents with LGBTQ+[1] children, I started speaking out because I wanted to make the world safer for my child. By about first grade, my child Danny was already being chastised for being different and I wanted this to stop. The first time I spoke out publicly was on a panel about the inclusive school climate at Danny's elementary school. I was angry that people were mistreating my child, and this came through. But, in reality, I hadn't always been so supportive. Over time, I realized that many of my deeply held beliefs about gender, about what is normal and what isn't, what is valued and what isn't, were at the root of my inability to fully celebrate my child for who they[2] were. If I had known what I know now, I would have worried less and celebrated my child more.

Danny is now an adult, and I've been working with families of LGBTQ+ children from many different backgrounds and countries for over 16 years. I have seen many parents' love for their children motivate deep change within them, transforming fear and shame into courage and pride. This change often comes at a cost, including loss of relationships with family members, friends, and religious communities. It also comes with healing, because when we free ourselves from rigid ideas about gender and sexual orientation, we find more freedom to be ourselves and to fully embrace our children for who they are.

Our children are changing us, and changing the world. My child challenged me to think differently. Now I'm convinced that unlearning and healing from the harm caused by binary, either/or ways of understanding and participating in gender is crucial for supporting our loved ones. In this chapter, I share my story and some of what I've learned and unlearned, in hopes that my voice makes a difference.

The Unquestioned Gender Assignment

After 44 hours of labor and a cesarean section due to complications, I awoke from the anesthesia and waited anxiously to meet my child. As I was rolled from the recovery room, my family greeted me, "You had a beautiful baby boy!" I had two possible names picked out, depending on my child's gender, and as I held my baby for the first time, I gave them the "boy's" name. I didn't realize it at the time, but my child wasn't a boy. That label was given to them according to the widespread practice of assigning sex (male or female) and assuming gender (boy or girl) based on genitalia. Along with the medical professionals who delivered my child, I accepted the gender assignment they were given without question and without my child's consent.

Years later, I learned that this seemingly innocent practice of assuming a child's gender at birth can be extremely harmful, especially to millions of people for whom the labels don't fit. This

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[1] LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. The + sign is added to recognize that there are limitless sexual orientations and gender identities.

[2] Danny uses they/them pronouns. See more on pronouns, [here](#).

includes transgender[3] and nonbinary[4] people who must challenge assumptions and expectations about their gender to be themselves. It also includes intersex[5] people, whose bodies are often surgically altered during childhood when consent is not possible.

Estimating the number of transgender and nonbinary people in the world is a challenging task because these terms are not universally used, leading to inconsistencies in how individuals identify themselves. Further, discrimination creates unsafe environments that discourage people from disclosing their identities. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive data collection systems dedicated to gathering information on transgender and nonbinary populations.

Population experts estimate that roughly two percent of the global population identifies as transgender, gender-fluid, or non-binary[6]. Based on the current worldwide birth rate of approximately 140 million annually, around 2.8 million babies born this year and 28 million over the next decade will identify as transgender, gender-fluid, or non-binary. But the number may be higher as suggested by a recent study conducted by the Pew Foundation. This study found that 5% of US adults under age 30 identify as a different gender than they were assigned at birth (Brown, 2022).

On an international scale, intersex individuals have organized themselves to advocate for their rights, including ending harmful medical practices, such as medically unnecessary genital surgery performed on children.[7] Though variations in genital appearance and reproductive anatomy are natural, surgeries to change these variations are often performed on children under the age of two. These surgeries often cause lifelong physical and emotional harm and, when performed without consent, are considered a violation of human rights.[8]

The practice of assigning sex and assuming gender now starts before birth, with the aid of ultrasound imaging. Gender reveal parties began growing in popularity in the US after 2008. Jenna Karvunidis[9], who started the trend, now regrets having done so. She believes that "obsession with gender can be limiting in some ways and exploitative in others."

The moment babies are sorted into the categories of boys and girls, their socialization into their respective gender roles begins. Families socialize infants intentionally or unconsciously in a

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[3] **"**Transgender is a broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born. "Trans" is often used as shorthand for transgender." National Center for Transgender Equity

[4] Nonbinary - "Some societies – like ours# – tend to recognize just two genders, male and female. The idea that there are only two genders is sometimes called a "gender binary," because binary means "having two parts" (male and female). Therefore, "nonbinary" is one term people use to describe genders that don't fall into one of these two categories, male or female." National Center for Transgender Equity

[5] "Intersex is an umbrella term for differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy. Intersex people are born with these differences or develop them in childhood. There are many possible differences in genitalia, hormones, internal anatomy, or chromosomes, compared to the usual two ways that human bodies develop." interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth It should be noted that intersex is not a gender identity.

[6] https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/trans-population-by-country

[7] https://oiiinternational.com/

[8] https://www.ohchr.org/en/2016/10/intersex-awareness-day-wednesday-26-october

[9] https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/jun/29/jenna-karvunidis-i-started-gender-reveal-party-trend-regret

variety of ways including choice of toys and clothing, ways of play and interacting, and use of language. [For example,](#) parents may be more likely to comfort a child who is presumed to be a girl or describe them as pretty. They may let babies who are presumed to be boys cry longer or refer to them as strong and active.

I wonder if I would have treated Danny differently from the moment of birth had I not assumed that they were a boy. It wasn't long before Danny started to challenge this assumption.

Turning Point

By the time they were 18 months old, I began to wonder about Danny's gender and sexual orientation. Danny loved little ponies, dolls, unicorns, dresses, and princesses, and almost exclusively played with girls at preschool. Because Danny's behavior wasn't what I expected from a boy, I worried that something was wrong with them. I began hearing terms like "gender variance" or "nontraditional boy" to describe children like mine. Instead of accepting my child the way they were, I feared that I was doing something wrong as their parent, and that something needed fixing.

I came across various "causes" of what I thought was a problem. I had suffered a devastating blow during my pregnancy - the loss of my first husband, Danny's dad. I read somewhere that trauma during pregnancy could negatively impact a developing fetus, and began to worry if this had been the case with my child. A friend advised me that the simple solution to Danny's gender-nonconforming behavior was a strong male role model. This idea added to feelings of inadequacy I already felt as a single mom. I began to believe that my child's well-being hinged on my ability to find a new partner who would become the father Danny needed.

A few weeks before Danny's 4th birthday, I asked them what they wanted to be for Halloween. Without a moment's hesitation, they told me they wanted to be a princess. I cringed inside and saw visions of children teasing, other parents passing judgment, and family members reacting badly. Expectations weighed heavily on my heart. I wanted to honor Danny's father by raising a child that would have made him proud and doubted that he would have approved of Danny wearing a princess dress. Reacting in fear, I offered Peter Pan as an alternative. But Danny knew exactly what they wanted, and I relented.

It was moments like these that put my parenting to the test. Would I try to pressure Danny to act more like a stereotypical boy? Or would I support them to be who they were? In these moments my child became my teacher, prompting me to look inward and challenge my ideas. Why did I worry that behaviors considered normal and healthy for a girl might be wrong for my child? Little did I know that this Halloween was a turning point that would eventually lead to a completely different way of thinking.

The Gender Binary

I didn't learn about the gender binary until after Danny graduated high school and I began working with LGBTQ+ activists who introduced me to the concept. Alok Vaid-Menon (2020), the author of **Beyond the Gender Binary**, defines the gender binary as "a cultural belief that there are only two distinct and opposite genders: man and woman." They further state that "this belief is upheld by a system of power that exists to create conflict and division, not to celebrate creativity and diversity" (p.5).

Before learning about the gender binary, I took it for granted that gender was a fact of nature or biology. I now recognize that the gender binary is a cultural belief and that gender is

understood differently depending on the cultural or historical context. Cultures on nearly every continent have had more than two genders throughout all of recorded history.[10] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (2002), the gender scholar and author, describes traditional Yoruba families as non-gendered. Kinship roles are non-gendered and rank is determined based on seniority. There are no single words for girl or boy.

In the gender binary, men and women are considered opposites, but not equal. The gender binary serves to uphold a patriarchal system in which men have power over women. The ideas and practices in patriarchal masculinity emphasize male superiority and authority over women, and the maintenance of gender inequality. Violence against women is used to maintain unequal access to economic, social, and political power (UN Women Training Centre).

The gender binary doesn't exist in isolation, but is a feature of white supremacy and colonialism (Lugones, 2008). It has been imposed historically and currently as part of colonial domination to privilege the European nuclear family structure over indigenous kinship structures and gain control over indigenous peoples. In many cases, this has involved the forced removal of children from families. Despite this, First Nations communities have continued to form kinship structures beyond nuclear families and blood relationships and recognize past and present identities beyond the gender binary (O'Sullivan, 2021).

Although there is no universal definition of masculinity and femininity, colonialism and racism have perpetuated standards based on whiteness and European features. For example, feminine beauty standards place a higher value on light skin, thin bodies, large breasts, straight hair, and large eyes. This reinforces a racial hierarchy that marginalizes and devalues Black women and other women of color (Deliovsky, 2008; Toby et al., 2020).

In the gender binary system, a child's gender assignment comes with a set of rules and expectations, depending on whether they are labeled girl or boy. These rules may be spoken or unspoken and range from how to dress, look, behave, move, speak, and identify, who to love and which bathroom or locker room to use. People who live by the rules are considered normal and granted more privileges. Those who don't fit into the binary and follow its rules are marginalized and punished, often with far-reaching consequences to health and mental health (Bauermeister et al., 2017). Children take part in enforcing gender expectations with their peers from an early age. According to a survey of US elementary school children, nearly 4 in 5 (79%) elementary school children hear remarks from other students about how boys should look or act, and 3 in 4 (75%) hear remarks about how girls should look or act (GLSEN and Harris Interactive, 2012).

As a mother, I felt the social pressure to raise a child who conformed to gender expectations. I feared that Danny would be ridiculed and I would be judged if I didn't steer them away from behaviors that were considered feminine. I grew up during the era of women's liberation and didn't believe in forcing my child into gender roles, but still accepted the basic premises of the gender binary. During my childhood, I absorbed information from all around me. The books I read and the TV shows and movies I watched, all presented a heterosexual and binary world, where transgender, nonbinary, and queer people didn't exist. I saw rewards and punishments

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[10] https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/

being doled out to people based on how well they played the assumed roles of their assigned genders. I saw girls being praised for being pretty and well-behaved and learned that this would lead to the ultimate reward of marrying a charming prince. Boys were rewarded for being tough and strong and one of the worst put-downs for a boy was to be called a girl.

What is Normal?
The gender binary defines normalcy based on standards that have nothing to do with what is natural, healthy, or good for us. *Heteronormativity* and *cisnormativity* are terms to describe social norms based on the assumptions that heterosexual people and cisgender[11] people are normal. Everyone else is considered deviant or abnormal. Together, they are sometimes referred to as *hetero-cis-normativity*.

The term *cisgender* was coined by Dana Defosse in 1994, who was a graduate student at the time. In Deffosse's words, "there did not seem to be a way to describe people who were not transgender without inescapably couching them in normalcy and making transgender identity automatically the 'other'. The term quickly became part of public discourse. Up until I learned about the term cisgender, I had thought of myself as "not transgender" or "normal" by implication. It then became important to acknowledge my cisgender experience and the privileges that come with this identity. Now I notice freedoms I previously took for granted, like being able to go out in public without being in danger of verbal or physical attack, being able to use a bathroom whether or not they are gender-inclusive, or being referred to with the correct pronouns.

According to the rules of *cisnormativity*, people who go along with social expectations related to gender are normal, and those who don't are not. If I hadn't judged my child through the lens of cisnormativity, I wouldn't have worried that something was wrong with them.

Heteronormativity and cisnormativity are closely related, with both being rooted in the gender binary. Drawing from different writings, scholar-activist, Kitzenger (2005) states that " "heteronormativity" describes socio-legal cultural, organizational, and interpersonal practices that derive from and reinforce a set of taken-for-granted presumptions relating to sex and gender. These include the presumptions that there are only two sexes; that it is "normal" or "natural" for people of different sexes to be attracted to one another; that these attractions may be publicly displayed and celebrated; that social institutions such as marriage and the family are appropriately organized around different-sex pairings; that same-sex couples are (if not "deviant") a "variation on" or an "alternative to" the heterosexual couple. Heteronormativity refers, in sum, to the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon." One example of heteronormativity is the double standard regarding who is expected to come out. Unlike LGBTQ+ people, straight people are not generally expected to come out because being heterosexual and cisgender is the default and expected norm.

Merriam-Webster defines normal as "conforming to a type, standard, or regular pattern: characterized by that which is considered usual, typical, or routine". It further defines *abnormal* as "deviating from the normal or average" or "unusual in an unwelcome or problematic way."

Sometimes social norms help people keep each other safe and healthy. Other times they can cause harm[12]. Cisnormativity, heteronormativity, and the binary way of looking at gender

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[11] [people who identify exclusively with the gender they were assigned at birth](#)
[12] https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/main/prevention-information/35

damage health and wellbeing[13]. While transgender, nonbinary, and intersex people are most marginalized, the impacts are far-reaching and include all of us. Binary gender socialization can harm children in various ways, damaging their sense of safety, self-esteem, social/emotional skill development, and career options[14]. The gender binary erases the existence of people whose identities and expressions don't fit within either/or categories. It also pressures us all to erase or suppress the parts of ourselves that don't fit gender expectations. If we fail to do so, we often pay a price.

Ideals of masculinity and femininity are not realistic and often cause stress for people who don't live up to them. Men, for example, may turn to violence when they feel their masculinity is threatened. Research suggests that masculinity strain is a factor for the majority of perpetrators (Morgan et al., 2022). Transgender people, particularly transgender women, face alarmingly high rates of violence including murder in many countries[15].

When we allow cisnormativity and heteronormativity to define what is normal, desirable, or problematic, we marginalize anyone who doesn't conform to social expectations related to gender. If we adhere to rigid standards of masculinity and femininity, we separate people from their full selves and each other. Social norms can change and LGBTQ+ people are playing a crucial role in changing these norms.

Moving Beyond the Gender Binary
During Danny's childhood, I was uncomfortable with how Danny expressed themself. Now, nothing brings me more joy than seeing Danny live their truth loudly and proudly. How did this shift in my outlook come about? Love and concern for my child were huge motivators but were not enough. My belief system related to gender also had to change. For me, this required unearthing and unlearning ideas I didn't even know I had. Being Danny's mom, and working side-by-side with LGBTQ+ activists and other parents helped me unlearn binary, either/or ideas about gender and the expectations that come along with them.

Unlearning systemic gender directives has also given me more freedom to be myself. I'm less worried about living up to standards of femininity that never felt true to who I was. I'm less fearful of others' judgment and more able to speak and live my truth. I have come to believe that freeing ourselves from binary thinking around gender can only make our lives better.

When I started speaking out, it was because I wanted to make the world safer for my child. Now I believe that LGBTQ+ people are making the world better for all of us. If we can move beyond the gender binary as we work for social justice, we can be freer to live more authentic and joyful lives. Imagine a world without pressure to live up to gender rules. Imagine families, schools, and communities where we grow up feeling safe, loved, and affirmed for who we are. This is a world I want to live in.

Here are just a few ways that we can all contribute to creating this world:

- Avoid making assumptions about anyone's gender or placing expectations on them based on gender.
- Celebrate and support the leadership of transgender, nonbinary, and intersex, and LGBTQ+ people.

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[13] https://www.healplusnm.org/how-the-gender-binary-is-bad-for-your-health/

[14] http://www.mayenoconsulting.com/wordpress/how-gender-boxes-harm-all-children-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/

[15] https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-tdor-2022/

- Speak up as an ally or co-conspirator in whatever communities you belong to.
- Add your voice to advocacy efforts.
- Learn about the gender binary and notice how it lives within you and the world around you.
- Learn about the connections between the gender binary, racism, colonialism, patriarchy and other oppressive systems.
- Learn about and use gender-inclusive language, including pronouns.
- Read books about gender and LGBTQ+ people to children, especially books that are being challenged or banned.
- Share what you are learning and keep the conversation going in your families, communities, faith communities, schools, or wherever you engage.
- Volunteer for and donate to organizations working for the rights of transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and LGBTQ+ people.

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Storytelling and Case Study- Pedagogies of Human Rights Education (HRE) in the Context of Higher Education

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HRE emphasizes the adoption of a combination of inclusive and innovative pedagogies to facilitate discussions on human rights values and challenges, thereby fostering an empathetic learning experience for all.

Teaching HRE is situated in context. For example, in certain sociocultural settings, where discussions about specific human rights issues are discouraged, you are not obligated to engage in such discussions. HRE is not about fostering a sense of rebellion, but rather nurturing resilience. However, when facilitating challenging topics that are culturally suitable to discuss but may still be difficult to have open dialogues with learners, employing contextual and conscious pedagogies- with flexibility, can be particularly valuable.

Various pedagogies may be utilized in HRE, for example, photovoice, narrative storytelling, reflective portfolios, autoethnography, gamification, case studies, arts-based approaches (like drawing, poetry, painting, music, visual art, role-play, theatre, etc), and community service. These and many others can be combined and adapted to the specific teaching context of HRE.

I strongly emphasize educators balance power relations, play the role of a co-creator of knowledge, embrace the culture of openness, and keep ideological bias aside when teaching HRE.

In this chapter, I have underscored the importance of storytelling and case studies as powerful pedagogies in HRE, particularly when addressing sensitive issues with university students.

Introduction

Storytelling, an enchanting art form, weaves captivating narratives that transcend time and connect us on a profound level. Across diverse mediums such as oral traditions, digital platforms, and visual masterpieces, stories come alive, leaving an indelible mark on us. It possesses an inherent power to captivate, inspire, and stir a range of emotions within its eager audience.

No longer confined to the realm of children, storytelling has transcended its limitations and emerged as a timeless art form that knows no boundaries of age or level. Embracing the rich tapestry of humanity, it captivates hearts and minds, enchanting individuals from all walks of life with its diverse and mesmerizing narratives.

Storytelling, as an inclusive pedagogy, offers remarkable flexibility that allows it to thrive in diverse contexts. Its versatility shines through as it becomes a powerful tool for conveying sensitive or complex concepts. It incorporates emotional elements that encourage others to share personal narratives, life insights, or stories of others. In my perspective, storytelling serves as a genuine and unfiltered medium of expressing narratives through the lens of experiences and exposures.

Storytelling has the potential to enhance imagination, transmit values, promote conscious thinking, foster empathy, boost confidence, build connectivity, accelerate collaboration, and

allow individuals to explore diverse perspectives and solutions. Additionally, it has the potential to expose individuals to their self-fragility, thereby fostering resilience. Most importantly, it can serve as a powerful tool for self-mending and nurturing well-being. In HRE, I consider storytelling as a 'pedagogy of connectivity, relatedness, and resilience'.

Sometimes, actively establishing a conscious connection with the stories of others can aid us in relating their ideas to our own lives, leading to the motivation to make informed and educated decisions. By "educated decisions," I mean engaging in conscious decision-making processes to comprehend and effectively address challenges. For example, through the publication of my open e-book titled "Silent Scream," a collection of inspiring stories on mental health, I witnessed the profound impact of storytelling. These narratives allowed countless individuals to connect with the experiences shared and transformed their perception of mental health, recognizing it as an intrinsic aspect of the human journey. The power of these stories prompted others to reach out, expressing their eagerness to contribute their tales to the collective narrative.

Within the realm of storytelling lies a transformative power, capable of empowering individuals to assert their true identity and unveil concealed aspects of themselves. Sociocultural constraints often confine certain expressions and experiences, but through the art of storytelling, these barriers are shattered, allowing individuals to reclaim their voices and share their narratives with authenticity and liberation. I recall a striking instance where one of my students symbolically depicted herself as a caged bird during an activity. The message resonated deeply with the audience, fostering a profound connection to the underlying reality being conveyed.

Storytelling does not always tread the path of positivity, for it can delve into the depths of our subconscious minds, stirring something dormant that may incite fierceness. As such, human rights educators must exercise caution when employing a neutral approach in disseminating stories, ensuring that the narratives are shared with sensitivity and respect for the diverse experiences and perspectives of the audience.

To effectively engage with audiences on matters of human rights, one must grasp the intricacies of the human rights context, master the art of storytelling, possess the finesse to express emotions and cultivate the skills to deeply connect with the hearts, minds, and souls of the audience.

The use of a case study fosters diverse perspectives and enhances learners' ability to analyze complex situations. It serves as a valuable tool in harnessing and expressing our unique perspectives and ideas. It also allows us to apply our creativity in finding innovative solutions or approaches. It indeed provides an open dialogue and self-empowering approach to decision-making.

Case study aids in comprehending the perspectives and complexities of human rights issues within diverse contexts. Through case studies, students can delve into specific instances where human rights have been infringed upon or protected, thereby engaging them in a comprehensive exploration. Through active participation and critical reflection, students acquire a profound comprehension of the prevailing circumstances, enabling them to collaboratively devise inclusive and innovative solutions to the human rights challenges at hand. These experiences equip them with the necessary skills to make informed and impactful decisions in their practical lives.

Various types of case studies can be used in human rights education, providing different approaches to examine and understand complex issues, like illustrative, exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, collective, and comparative case studies.

For human rights education, a scenario-based case study is often considered more suitable. In this type of case study, students are presented with realistic scenarios and are required to analyze the situation, consider different perspectives, and propose appropriate solutions based on human rights values.

From my perspective, we all harbor latent elements of intolerance within us, quietly residing until triggered by various factors that can reveal our true selves. In this regard, case studies serve as valuable tools to assess students' resilience and tolerance, providing insights into their capacity to navigate and respond to challenging situations.

To effectively engage with case studies and propose intellectual and ethical solutions, students must strengthen their reading, research, and fieldwork skills.

Topics such as non-consensual intimate partner violence, domestic violence, child sexual abuse, genital mutilation, and child trafficking[1], may present challenges in open discussions across cultural settings. However, storytelling and case studies can effectively address and navigate delicate themes.

Below, I have crafted an imaginary story about Aliza, who falls victim to marital rape. It is an illustrative example to enhance the audience's comprehension of the efficacy of this teaching strategy.

STORY

ABC[2], a girl blessed with simplicity, had dreams and aspirations just like any other girl her age. Her humility was a testament to her character. She had a calm and patient nature, which helped her endure the hardships that came her way. Life's journey unfolds before us, imparting invaluable lessons that beckon us to embrace the stark reality of a world often plagued by cruelty and self-centeredness. Unfortunately, some people use our dignity and simplicity for their selfish purposes. The same happened with ABC.

ABC came from a poor family. She was a bright young girl who wanted to make a difference in the world, but her circumstances seemed to have taken that opportunity away from her. Her family's financial situation made it impossible for her to continue her education after the age of 15. Her parents started requesting relatives and community members to send marriage proposals for their daughter, almost as if she were being treated as a commodity up for sale. It is perplexing why parents, due to their hardships, would make such a hasty decision at the tender age of 15. Wouldn't it have been wiser for them to consider whether they were capable of meeting all the needs of their child before bringing her into the world?

She was just 16 years old when she was forced into a marriage. Her parents saw ABC as a way to pay off their debts by marrying her off to a rich man named XYZ. Without conducting any

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[1] Sensitive topics, such as the ones mentioned, are more suitable for storytelling in higher education settings (with learners' consent), whereas at the school level, it is advisable to avoid engaging in discussions on these topics.

[2] In order to ensure sensitivity and respect for individuals' sentiments, it is recommended to avoid using specific human names in storytelling.

background checks, the sole criterion for accepting a proposal was the financial status. The decision to marriage led to a chain of events that would have a devastating impact on ABC's life.

Soon after their marriage, ABC was showered with luxury, taken on tours, and adorned with extravagant jewelry. However, these moments of happiness were short-lived as XYZ's true intentions emerged—he was driven solely by his desires.

Within two weeks of their marriage, XYZ sensed that ABC was not content with their relationship. When XYZ inquired about her desires, he was taken aback by her response—she expressed her aspiration to pursue higher education and become a lawyer. XYZ, however, had different expectations, envisioning a traditional role for ABC where she would obediently follow his commands, focus on household chores, and cater to his needs.

One day, she was forced to be physically intimate with XYZ without her consent. This is a terrifying experience for anyone to endure. She likely felt helpless, violated, and traumatized. Additionally, XYZ started using ABC's family's debt as a way to threaten her into compliance. To preserve her family's honor and respect, she had to accept bondage. In many cultures, a woman's reputation and her family's reputation are closely linked. This can create a situation where women feel they have no choice but to comply with the demands of their husbands, even if it goes against their wishes and well-being. Maintaining a harmonious relationship and respecting each other's dignity is of utmost importance. Both husbands and wives should fulfill their responsibilities and duties, but it should not be at the cost of living in fear and isolation. Women should be empowered with the knowledge that if they find themselves in a situation that goes against their will or if they feel threatened, they have the right to take action. However, to do so, women must be self-reliant, which highlights the significance of providing education to daughters as a foundation for their independence. In this case, ABC was helpless. She found herself trapped in a marriage where she was not respected, loved, or valued.

Despite enduring persistent acts of non-consensual intimate partner violence, ABC remained steadfast in pursuing her dreams. She wanted to meet people, explore the world, and have a meaningful life. However, her husband saw her as nothing more than a possession, someone who would take care of his home and fulfill his physical needs. He didn't care about her desires, her aspirations, or her wellbeing.

She was not allowed to meet people or leave the house, and whenever guests arrived, she was locked in a room. Despite staying in touch with her family through phone calls, their guidance was disheartening. They insisted that she should unquestioningly obey her husband and dismissed her concerns without a second thought. Her mother, in particular, reinforced the belief that being married into a wealthy family was a blessing, emphasizing the financial relief they experienced because of her union. She urged her daughter to prioritize her husband's happiness above her own, emphasizing the perceived duty she owed to him. It was a disheartening reality, where her pleas for understanding and support fell on deaf ears, leaving her feeling isolated and trapped in a web of societal expectations.

On some days, ABC was treated like a queen, showered with love, affection, and attention. But on other days, she was relegated to the role of a slave, subjected to mistreatment and disrespect.

Imagine living at the mercy of others, where even the simplest desires like craving a burger or indulging in icecream become distant dreams…The idea of buying a new dress seems like a

luxury beyond reach, as you must constantly depend on others for financial support. In such a reality, your autonomy and independence are overshadowed.

Once, ABC mustered the courage to ask her husband if they could go out for a walk together, and to her surprise, her request was fulfilled. The joy of finally seeing the outside world after such a long time overwhelmed her. While she longed to meet her parents as well, she decided to save that request for another time. However, as they sat in a restaurant, the weight of her emotions became too much to bear, and she couldn't help but burst into tears in front of the other, inadvertently making her husband feel guilty. XYZ took her back home and beat her mercilessly until she was on the verge of collapsing. He then locked her in a room without any food or water for days, as a punishment. Days passed, and ABC suddenly showed up with a bouquet, trying to express his love and apologize for his violent behavior. His abusive and manipulative behavior towards ABC reflects his deep-seated misogyny and lack of respect for women.

Every day, she offered prayers, pleading silently that her husband would not subject her to physical intimacy against her will. Deep down, she understood that she could not endure this existence indefinitely. However, when she discovered she was pregnant, a glimmer of hope ignited within her. She believed that this new life growing inside her would grant her the courage to stand up for her rights and reclaim her identity.

Unfortunately, ABC's husband's abuse resulted in a miscarriage, which was a devastating blow to her. However, this tragedy made her even more determined to speak up for her rights and leave her abusive husband. ABC felt a mix of fear and relief as she left her home, knowing that she was risking her life to escape the abusive husband who had controlled her every move. She was scared of what lay ahead, but also hopeful that she could finally live a life of freedom and dignity. She carried a deep concern for her family members, always hoping for their acceptance and understanding. However, this time, she decided to shift her focus and prioritize her well-being.

She arrived at the bus station- vulnerable and alone. But she refused to let that define her future, and with determination and resilience, she started a new life in a quiet rural area. There, she found solace in nature and the support of a kind and understanding man named IJK, who had suffered from child abuse during childhood. Together, they found a sense of purpose and belonging as they learned new skills and pursued their interests. Despite the pain and scars that remained, ABC felt a glimmer of hope and joy that she had not experienced in a long time.

- *If you found yourself in ABC's position, how would you navigate the challenges she faced?*
- *If you found yourself in XYZ's position, how would you ensure the well-being and respect of ABC?*

Moral: Girls should not be treated as Automated Teller Machines! Instead of being forced into early marriages, they deserve the freedom to pursue their dreams. The prevalence of martial abuse must be eradicated! This story serves as a powerful reminder that it is always possible to rebuild a life after experiencing trauma. It teaches us that it is never too late to chase our dreams.

Responding to Environmental Crisis with Love and Creativity

Marte Skaara
Co-founder and Creative Director of Climate Creativity

Environmental literacy is declining as the climate crisis is worsening and the loss of biodiversity accelerating. In this chapter, I will reflect on the potential of storytelling to help learners respond to the environmental crisis in meaningful ways. This is not a practical guide on creative writing, but a personal text about how to express our love for the world and find our story through healing and learning the language of place.

How to love this world?
My story started on a small farm along the North Sea. It's a place of wind and waves. The meadows are covered with wildflowers. You hear the seagulls cry, as the common linnets land on the straws to feed, and swallows nest in the barn. Horses and sheep roam free among the wild animals.

Many years ago, my engagement for the environment was triggered when my uncles sold parts of the farm to developers. Lately, I've been fighting the local government's plan to turn the whole area into a center for vacation homes. This struggle is important to me, because building vacation homes is one of the big drivers of nature loss in Norway.

I crossed the fields on our farm one day, exhausted by conflict over land, and asked myself: Why do I keep fighting for this place? In the same moment, a pair of swallows flew past to remind me. It is my love for this world that fuel my work and activism. As a reminder, I put up a sign in front of the farmhouse.

It reads:

"There is only one question: how to love this world. - Mary Oliver*"*

Karen O'Brien, a social scientist working on climate change and transformation, defined climate change as a relationship problem, and this definition stuck with me. If the problem is our relationships (to other people, to plants and animals, to the land and the ocean), then the response must be love. So, I choose to see my relationship to the world as a love story, guided by the poet Mary Oliver's ultimate question: How to love this world?

Becoming whole/world
When I first sat down to write my story, I wrote about feelings of loss, sadness, and anger. When you love the world deeply, loss of nature can cause great pain. I've felt this pain myself, and I've seen it one the face of Samí activists fighting for their rights to their land; on the face of an elder Arara medicine man in opposition to the development of the Belo Monte dam along the Xingú river in the Amazon rainforest; and on the face of my young nephew, when there were not enough snow in my home town to make a snow man because of climate change.

The Arara medicine man, Leoncio, talked about the forest spirit and the river spirit, and how the river spirit would be gone if water was diverted to the dam. At the time, I did not understand what he was talking about. The past ten years, I have actively been trying to discover the spirits on our farm: the ocean spirit, the mountain spirit. I feel them now and realize I have known them all along. Because when the developers blew up the mountains to build vacation homes,

I could feel the spirit hurting and something in me breaking. For activists and other advocates for nature, speaking of their love of the world may require healing, to find ways to grieve and move beyond the kind of unhealthy anger, and even hate, that eats you up from the inside. Mother, scientist, and author Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that:

"To love a place is not enough. We must find ways to heal it."

If we adopt a relational view of place, healing a place would require mending the relations in that place, including relationships with one selves, neighbours, visitors, and spirits.

Physician and trauma expert, Gabor Maté defines trauma as a "lasting rupture or split within the self" and healing as becoming whole. He encourages us to accept all emotions, because a rejection of any part of our experience would be a rejection of the self. Acceptance allows for grief, admission of anger, free agency, and our authentic experience, he writes in his book, *The Myth of Normal*. For me, finding meaningful practices to accept my emotions and reconnect with the land, is an important part of becoming whole.

On the farm, I put my hands in the soil and dig a small hole, and then another one and another one. As I work the land, I can feel the anger and sadness of past events making way for the present feelings of belonging and joy. In the small holes I plant sunchokes. I long to see them grow and bloom, and I feel my body fill with love for life. The abundance of nature gives me hope for a better tomorrow - one where humans rediscover their roots to the land.

The paragraph above is part of a story that I wrote for our story and art project called Climate Illustrated. Writing about my practice and naming the emotions, helped me accept them and move on. In such, creative writing in the form of storytelling was also an important practice to me in my healing. Creativity is about possibility, seeing what *can* and *wants* to be created, according to Maté. He sees creativity as a part of authenticity and related to authorship.

Healing in place, goes beyond becoming whole as an individual, to realizing how we are an integral part of the world – that we *are* the world. The transformational process of 'becoming world' is described by philosopher Rosi Braidotti as a sustainable becoming. The desire to belong and go on becoming is the productive side of love for fate, she writes in *Transposition*. Braidotti's notion of how to love the world, is such a beautiful one. She says in her book:

"To be up to the intensity of life, the challenge, the hurt of all that happens to us entails great faith in the connection to all that lives. This is the love for the world that frames a horizon of sustainability and hence hope."

Learning the language of place
To express our love for the world, we need a place-based language. On Monday's, I sometimes join a group in Oslo that sit one hour in silence for climate. One Monday, I was on the farm, and decided to sit an hour in silence, although I was not with the group. This hour, I became aware that when I listened deeply, I could pick up on the hymn of the ocean from very far away. I noticed new variations in the sound of the wind and tuned into the world of bird sounds.

Kimmerer writes that:

"To be native to a place we must learn to speak its language."

Listening is essential for learning a language. By listening in place, we learn to understand the language of this place. Listening to the cry of the birds, the deep rumbling of the wind and the waves, thought me how to scream. Standing on the mountain top, my spirit lifted, I could let it all out – all the frustration and anger. For so long, I had felt the pain of the land in my body. I had carried the scream within for more than a decade before I finally let it out. I first needed to learn the language of place. It was the only language that could express my whole experience. Today, when I´m on the farm and feel the anger build, I express my emotions there and then through whistling, song, or scream. My grandmother, who used to run the farm, was a Christian woman, and although I'm not a religious person myself, I resort to a Norwegian hymn when I feel sad or scared.

I'm still just a beginner, which is strange, because the language of this place is really my mother tongue. The tongue of Mother Earth herself. While I spent much of my childhood on the farm, the modern individualistic mindset is not wired for connection, belonging and joy, and without these conditions, it is hard to understand the language of place.

The disconnection between children and nature has reached an alarming extent in today's world. Scientists have come up with a label for this ongoing alienation: "the extinction of experience". At the same time, children as young as 3 years old recognize "child-oriented" brands, according to the study "Children's Understanding of Brand Symbolism". Many learners are fluent in the language of capitalism, while stumbling over their words of place.

I sometimes bring groups of young learners out in nature, to the ocean. One group found a dead bird and wanted to bury it. A teacher was hesitant to the suggestion, but I told the children to go ahead. The whole group took part in the bird's funeral. Afterwards I asked one of the boys why burying the bird was important to him. His one-word answer was profound: *Respect*.

Burying a dead bird is an act that speaks of respect, care, and love. When learners are allowed to gain experience in places with biodiversity and respond authentically to events taking place, acts of loving the world occurs spontaneously. Our job as educators and fellow learners is to nurture love for the world by making space for emotions and creativity.

Storytelling serves as a powerful tool for nurturing creativity, enabling learners to unleash their imagination and give voice to their emotions. Telling personal stories allows us to understand ourselves and the world by using the left and the right side of our brains together. The right brain contributes the bodily sensations, raw emotions, and personal memories, while the left brain puts these things in order through words and logic. In such, storytelling helps us see the larger picture and share our experience. This process is especially important for children when they are experiencing strong emotions, according to the authors of *The Whole-Brain Child*.

A personal story can involve our experiences (burying the bird), our values (respect), our emotions (connection) and insights (birds deserve our respect). Acts of love for the world makes for great stories and is part of our sustainable becoming.

'How to love the world' is the question, and the answer is for each and one of us to discover through healing and learning the language of place. Storytelling can help learners to explore the question and see possibilities for sustainability.

No Limits

John Row, Story Teller and Poet

Ralph Waldo Emmerson wrote, 'Let the subject dictate the form'. The transcendentalists were all about art not being limited by convention. Now we might say 'Let the subject dictate the medium'.

In the twenty-first century, we have at our fingertips a range of ways to express ourselves that far surpass anything. Mr. Emmerson and his fellow traveler and tenant, Thoreau could have imagined.

Personally, for the most part, I use three that existed in their time: storytelling, poetry, and painting, and one late twentieth and twenty-first-century invention, live film on the world wide web. Without the latter, I would never have been asked to write this chapter.

The emergence of instant broadcasting in virtual reality has revolutionized the way we connect with people worldwide. This technology grants individuals the freedom to decide their level of engagement, whether as active participants in a live audience or as discreet observers, with the flexibility to watch at their convenience or during the live broadcast itself.

For artists, this has produced challenges. Technical challenges are easier to overcome. We all learned during lockdown how to position ourselves about the camera, so our heads weren't being sliced off at the forehead, or to avoid an angle where our audience could see straight up our nostrils. The most challenging aspect was mastering the art of engaging with an audience that we were neither physically present with nor entirely disconnected from, as is the case with traditional mediums like television or cinema.

Having reached a state of comfort in connecting with our audiences, we had to acknowledge the dual nature of our position, considering that we were likely only witnessing a fraction of those who were watching. Furthermore, we had to be mindful of the global reach of our audience. There is the seemingly straightforward problem of broadcasting to different time zones simultaneously. I say seemingly because as performers, we often create different material for daytime audiences, where there maybe children present, and for evening shows mainly aimed at adults.

Furthermore, cultural sensitivities come into play, leading us to ponder whether self-censorship should be employed to prevent offending. We all have to make our own choices here, there is no right or wrong answer. However, as a curator of a storytelling website, I sometimes have to provide advice.

Having sorted out these conundrums in our heads, the possibilities are endless, There have been phenomenal international collaborations on line. We can build communities of all age groups. I am particularly interested in developing communities of young people across the globe and seeing, how they automatically embrace the new world and push the limits of what is possible in their presentations. Every Tuesday, the worldstorytellingcafe.com hosts a special event, offering a platform for young storytellers under the age of twenty-five to showcase their talent. Participants are encouraged to tell their stories in any language they feel comfortable with, although the majority of storytellers opt for English as their preferred medium of expression. This is just one of many initiatives created during the pandemic. This has major implications

for those cut off from the rest of the world either through geography or the politics of adults, providing hope for the future and expanding their horizons.

I do not see this virtual world as a replacement for face-to-face performance, but as a separate medium of itself.

Fortunately, one of the oldest art forms, in fact, probably one of the reasons, why homo sapiens survived as a species, while Neanderthals either died out or were absorbed, storytelling, is alive and well. In some countries, it needs resuscitation admittedly, but it hasn't been completely lost anywhere.

I am here to talk about the passing on of traditional stories. I recognise those of us that call ourselves storytellers do not have a monopoly on the art form.

Where ever people meet, they tell stories. It is part of what makes us human. Gossip is merely telling stories about other people. When old people sit together and reminisce, they are storytelling. Even when young people chat for hours on their mobile devices, often standing in groups so everyone can hear the conversation, they are using all the tools of the storytelling trade- exaggeration, suspense, disbelief, gasps of surprise, the bigger the audience the greater the performance.

The passing on and telling of traditional stories has never been so important. Once before as people moved from the countryside to the cities, there was the realisation that much was being lost and the great collectors either wrote down and published stories from their area or traveled the countryside with their notebooks, writing down tales from the country folk. Change now is even more rapid. People are not just moving into the cities, they are moving countries and not to the vast open landscapes of the New World, but to already established communities. If you were to ask the average class of schoolchildren in London about the origins of their grandparents, you would probably discover that they come from every continent on Earth. However, if you were to inquire about the stories their grandparents were told, you might be met with a multitude of blank expressions.

While there are thousands of traditional stories available to us from the great collectors of the past and the old tellers we might have had the privilege of meeting, there are many more, we are in danger of losing forever. This is not just a tragedy for those of us interested in traditional stories but is a loss to future generations who will only be presented with material from the dominant cultures. Connecting children with stories from the lands and especially the regions of their parents and grandparents helps prevent cultural dislocation, increases self-pride and broadens their horizons as they face the future. It is not a substitute for the electronic world, nor is it superior to it. Rather, it is a valuable addition, complementing the digital realm in a significant way.

In every country where the native language and culture have been suppressed, whether due to officialdom or self-censorship, there often emerges a rekindling of interest in what has been lost when a middle class begins to develop.

The most well-known of these was the 'negritude movement' in the French colonies in Africa, which went on to influence the Harlem Renaissance in the U.S.A, but I have seen similar initiatives elsewhere.

I saw it amongst the Sami in Finnish Lapland, where young people in college in the cities are studying leisure and tourism, but whose grandparents had distanced themselves from their language and tradition due to fear of being considered inferior. There is a storytelling tradition going back over a thousand years in Marrakesh in Morocco. It was in danger of disappearing because the square, Jemaa el-Fnaa had become too noisy with drummers, snake charmers, and electronic music for the storytellers to make themselves heard. Besides with all the paraphernalia of the modern world at their disposal, the interest in storytelling was waning. Fortunately, one of the masters, Haj Ahmed Ezzarghani teamed up with the Clock Cafe in the Casbah to pass on the stories to a new generation. These fledgling tellers continue to study with the masters and are now the backbone of the revival with their storytelling school. They teamed up with the World Storytelling Cafe and co-produced two international storytelling festivals sending storytellers into a hundred schools and reviving storytelling on the square. The flame which never died but for a while was little more than a glowing ember, is now burning strong.

It is the duty of all of us involved in storytelling to try and get schools to see the importance of encouraging students to be enthusiastic about their traditions and stories. To quote W.B. Yeats 'education should not be the filling of the pail but the lighting of the fire'.

Our students can be modern day collectors. They don't even need to write. They can record them on their phones and then choose how they are presented, maybe written and published, maybe as podcasts or even dramatised. The possibilities are endless. All they need is the raw material and the incentive.

Traditional stories offer us a way to explore the timeless challenges that humans face by using archetypal characters and narratives. We can examine these stories in their historical context and then apply them to our own lives. However, it's important to be cautious and avoid perpetuating old biases and prejudices related to race, gender, and other outdated beliefs.

The essence of storytelling becomes meaningless if we fail to make it enjoyable for our students. We should encourage them to play with stories, express themselves freely, and even create their own narratives without the pressure of writing them down.

How many children suffered the death of literature in the classroom because a teacher treated the great works as sacred objects, cutting all the life out of them with the dissecting knife? The same applies to poetry. It is as much about sound and shape as it is about meaning. Most children first contact with what will become poetry comes to them before they are even able to speak in the form of nursery rhymes. As they progress, fortunate students may have the opportunity to listen to poems that resonate with rich sounds and captivating rhythms.

Those who become captivated by the magic of words will delight in the art of playing with language, shaping it into new and imaginative forms. There are no rules. It is the perfect way for people with complex feelings to express themselves. While we can demonstrate various approaches and encourage them to experiment, the most impactful way is to expose them to a wide array of storytelling forms from diverse cultures. It doesn't mean we shouldn't provide explanations at all but rather use the clues we give as tools to foster a deeper appreciation of the poems, rather than treating them as mere analysis for an exam paper. For example, it is useful to know the Bengali poet and playwright, Rabindranath Tagore's book, Gitanjali. It was first published in English in 1912 when India was under British rule and he was the first Indian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. If our students are told no more than this, they will be free to do their research either into the colonial history of the period and/or of the poet.

Poetry at its most interesting is never divorced from the world in which it was written. I remember at school, when we studied Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess', our literature teacher told us about how much poison was used by the aristocracy in the period to get rid of their partners. He was using the story as a hook to get a bunch of uncouth boys to take an interest in the poem.

Poetry has always been visual on the page, and appeals to the eye as well as the ear. Stories rely on us being able to visualise them in either words or pictures when they are being told. For some individuals, the most effective means of self-expression comes in the form of pictures, while others may find that neither storytelling, poetry nor virtual reality fully captures their desired outcome, leading them to resort to the paintbrush as their creative outlet. Whatever we use, let the subject dictate which is best for us and we should encourage our students to do the same.

Free expression means being free to use all the tools at our disposal and the history of those tools. Our job as artists working in education is to add as many tools to our students' tool boxes as possible and to encourage them to love and enjoy using them.

The fun for us as artists is to push ourselves beyond the limits convention has imposed on us. The joy of working in the first quarter of the twenty-first century is to have at our disposal a myriad of tools never before available either available or affordable to us.

There are no limits whether we are expanding our knowledge of traditional stories or experimenting with forms made possible through cutting-edge technology or even seeing how a hybrid approach can enhance both.

The Essence of Evidence-based, Gender-Sensitive, and Inclusive Prevention, Treatment, Rehabilitation, and Recovery Programmes

World Federation Against Drugs, Sweden

The importance of gender sensitivity within drug policy and services has gained momentum in recent years. Despite this, and albeit the historic gender gap in substance use dependency is narrowing between young women and men, the gap in availability of and access to treatment is still evident. Proportionally, women have less access to treatment services than men, due to several barriers including a lack of women-specific treatment facilities, cultural boundaries as well as the barriers connected to the double stigmatisation faced by women who use drugs. Furthermore, available services often lack gender-sensitive measures that are trauma-informed, lack of childcare or women-only services. Furthermore, a gender perspective is imperative within the framing and implementation of prevention. Different prevention strategies have varying effect on girls and boys respectively (UNODC 2020)[1]. It is important that prevention strategies are gender-sensitive, culturally and age-appropriate and that gender-disaggregated data is collected and evaluated so to better understand which prevention strategies are effective.

Nevertheless, as expressed by the World Health Organisation, health is a fundamental human right and "legal obligations on states to ensure access to timely, acceptable, and affordable health care"[2] must be undertaken. Every person holds the right to security, access to health care services, and the right to obtain medical care while ensuring that their dignity is respected. It is also imperative that the responsibility and capacity of all human beings are fortified in protecting and enhancing the right to evidence-based health care services and that these services are enabled, equipped, and empowered to strengthen good physical and psycho-social health. Thus, it is important to note that human rights are supported by strengthening prevention, ensuring access to treatment, and promoting recovery-oriented systems of care.

This article will showcase the importance of inclusive, trauma-informed, evidence-based, and gender-based prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery mechanisms. It also highlights the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive approaches and policies and the necessity for their further integration and implementation. It will provide an overview of the need for gender-based mechanisms in prevention, treatment, and recovery. The article is based on previously published statements and infographics by WFAD and partners. We encourage readers to review the original documents to enhance your comprehension of the various factors related to gender that should be considered when designing prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery interventions.

Introduction
Using a gender perspective in the field of addiction and recovery provides a better understanding of the specific causes, and consequences of substance use disorders as well as the available services sensitised to people's needs. Recent research within the field that deploys a gender perspective has shed light on the variations observed among genders, not only in terms of substance use dependency but also in the consequences and effects of substance use. Overall, women and men are subject to different social and cultural conditions that can lead to different outcomes of drug use. Women typically initiate substance use at a later and to a lesser extent compared to men; however, it has been observed that their progression towards addiction can

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[1] https://www.unodc.org/documents/prevention/UNODC-WHO_2018_prevention_standards_E.pdf
[2] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/human-rights-and-health

be faster, also known as telescoping[3]. Women and girls who use drugs and/or have a dependency are often identified later and once identified have more complex patterns of use and co-morbidity. This delay can be attributed to gender-specific barriers in accessing treatment, lack of early detection measures and the compounded stigma faced. Additionally, research shows that substance use by women is often strongly influenced by intimate partners who also use substances. Furthermore, women may be more susceptible to cravings and relapse, highlighting the unique challenges they encounter in the recovery process. Hence, it is important to understand and incorporate the various gender-components affecting the substance use, treatment, and recovery pathway. Interventions do not only need to be sensitised, but also include monitoring and evaluation based on gender-disaggregated data for further understanding and improvement.

The next part of the article will elaborate on the gender differences in substance use initiation and treatment and recovery as interventions can have opposite effects, if gender sensitivity has not been applied.

Gender-Based Prevention
As we see diverse incentives and triggers of substance use depending on gender, it is important to understand these differences to develop appropriate and effective prevention tools.

Risk factors
Protective factors play a crucial role in enhancing self-regulation, impulse control, and executive decision-making abilities. They contribute to the development of positive coping mechanisms and resilience. On the other hand, risk factors, such as negative experiences or adverse environments can lead to the opposite.

The risk factors are divided into three groups that lead to the primary outcome of substance use and its related problems. The first group is macro-level influences. This includes aspects such as income and resources, social environment, and physical environment. The second group is micro-level influences, which revolve around, for example, family, school, and peer influence. Finally, personal characteristics are seen as a third group of influence. This includes genetic susceptibilities, mental health, neurological development, and stress reactivity. These groups overlap and interact, which is important to consider when identifying relevant targets for programmes and policies.

A substantial risk factor for the initiation of substance use is early life (or childhood) adversity, which can be a mixture of macro and micro-level influences. It consists of experiences that can lead to toxic stress and include child abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, and family economic hardship [4]. Childhood adversity is associated with "an increased risk of substance use, harmful use, and dependence [since the] drug may occur as a maladaptive response to stressful experiences" [5]. Within adversity, differences exist between genders. Compared to boys, girls report a higher number of negative life experiences during adolescence and are also more "likely to experience interpersonal stressors and be adversely affected by them". Similarly, other micro-level influences also showcase different outcomes in abstention or the initiation of drug use among the genders. For example, peer pressure is a significant influence on both genders, shaping their attitudes and behaviors. However, research suggests that boys may be

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[3] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3767417/
[4] Office of Early Childhood Development 2020
[5] UNODC 2018, 28

more susceptible to the influence of their school and community environments. Additionally, the home and family environment has a profound impact on a child's overall development. A "chaotic home environment, ineffective parenting, and a lack of mutual attachment"[6] can lead to a negative impact on the child. Nevertheless, these factors affect girls more than boys as they tend to be more impacted by family-centred and relational problems. The connected stress and mental health issues can lead to the early onset of substance use.

Besides potential adverse experiences faced during childhood, women can be triggered by a variety of factors that lead to the initiation of substance use. Factors such as fatigue, stress, loneliness, low self-esteem, body image issues, etc. can cause the adoption of certain behavioural changes which possibly lead to substance use dependency. Common motivations for women to use substances are also connected to chronic pain, mental illness, and/or trauma. The initiation of substances is often linked to the ability to take over certain control of something of dislike and is used as part of a coping mechanism[7].

The limited gender-sensitive research available has showcased that certain prevention models work better for boys than girls and vice versa. For example, prevention in the school environment tends to work better for boys, whereas prevention programmes in families are more effective for girls.

Importance of Prevention
Prevention plays a vital role within the continuum of care framework, fostering overall health and well-being. By enhancing protective factors, we not only deter substance use dependency but also mitigate other risky behaviors. Empowering girls and women with education, knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes enables them to make informed choices and avoid substance use, thus preventing the development of dependency.

There are several other positive outcomes of prevention, such as:
- It is less costly than treatment
- It is a continuum of behavioural health-promoting healthy living
- Prevention and treatment provide opportunities for self-actualisation in women
- It improves the societal value of the person
- It encourages a boost in socio-economic activities
- It can focus on reducing and limiting adverse childhood experiences

To create effective prevention tools, it is necessary to understand the influences of various factors. Firstly, individual and environmental factors create vulnerability and progression of substance use. Secondly, the different incentives and triggers of substance use for different genders. Thirdly, the various protective and risk factors. Fourthly, macro-, and micro-level influence and personal characteristics. Finally, experienced childhood adversity.

It is important to note that effective prevention interventions, policies, or systems cannot be done in isolation. To be effective, "local and national prevention systems should be embedded and integrated into a larger health-centred and balanced system responding to drugs"[8]. Prevention interventions require long-term funding, sustainability, being rooted in the local context, and evaluated and monitored using data disaggregated by gender.

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[6] Kumpfer, Smith, and Summerhays 2008
[7] https://wfad.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WFAD-GWG-Prevention-Paper.pdf
[8] UNODC and WHO 2018, 3

Gender-based treatment

While prevention is essential, the inclusion of treatment and rehabilitation services to encourage the pathway of recovery in the health system cannot be forgotten. As mentioned, addiction is generally discovered later among women than men and different substance use patterns exist. The additional double stigmatisation and unique obstacles based on gender hinder access [effective] treatment has led to a gender gap in treatment with women being the minority among patients in addiction treatment centers (20% at most).

In the "Way Forward", jointly developed by Dianova and WFAD in 2020, six barriers were identified and discussed to bring attention to them. The article also offers recommendations on how to effectively reduce these barriers. The six barriers defined were:

1) Lack of gender perspective in treatment;
2) Invisibility of women's problematic drug use;
3) Lack of collaboration between addiction services and other services;
4) Stereotyped attitudes and beliefs on behalf of service providers;
5) Lack of a gender-based violence focus during addiction treatment;
6) The faced double stigma by women[9].

Each of the barrier is further elaborated in the infographic. One specific barrier that is further elaborated on is the obstacle of stigma.

Stigma is a "social process that leads to the marginalisation or labelling of individuals or groups [and] involves judging, blaming, discriminating, penalising, or shaming"[10]. It has a detrimental impact on access to treatment and the social and vocational reintegration of individuals (job searching, accessing decent housing, etc.). Stigma negatively impacts the Recovery Capital, also known as the internal and external resources necessary to achieve and sustain recovery.

Stigma

Drug dependence is ranked among the five most stigmatised health conditions in the world. Stigma manifests on different levels, including individual, family, societal, structural, and institutional. Each level of stigma influences the barriers faced to seek for support. 1) Individual stigma, also known as internalised stigma, is enhanced by societal stigma. Internalised stigma can isolate the person with a substance use disorder. Self-stigma can create an identity attributed to others, establishing a feeling of uselessness, lowered self-esteem, and self-efficiency; 2) Societal stigma is operated across societal levels through social orders. [The fear of] stigmatisation, discrimination, and exclusion of society, can lead to serious mental health issues, undermines confidence, and can deprive the person of accessing medical and social services; 3) Institutional stigma is manifested through discriminating laws, policies, and practices that are embedded in national and local institutions, governance, systems and services, which can lead to a lack of availability and accessibility to the needed services.

Stigma has a strong impact on different domains of quality of life. Women who have substance use disorders often face double stigmatisation. Firstly, they face the stigma of using substances. Secondly, they experience the stigma related to not fulfilling the normative gender and family roles, such as the caregiver role, which can cause social penalisation. Additionally, women

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[9] Read the full "Way Forward" article
[10] http://ldhrights.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/LDHR-Gender-GBV-and-Stigma-Mapping-Report-FINAL.pdf

with substance use disorders are less visible than men. The negative effects of their substance dependency are often discovered at a more progressed stage of their addiction, as they often create strategies to preserve their social and family responsibilities while using substances. Hence, an increased number of barriers are faced by women to access treatment. Once treatment has been accessed, heightened and severe profiles of social, medical, and behavioural problems are seen. Therefore, it is particularly important to include sensitivity to stigma in all aspects of prevention, treatment, reintegration, and recovery programmes for women and girls. Simultaneously, it should be aimed to decrease stigma on all levels (including professionals, service commissioners, government, civil society, etc.) to address barriers and encourage women to embark on the recovery journey early on[11].

Not only do stigma and certain barriers withhold women to enter treatment, for many women, treatment is inaccessible. To increase effectiveness, treatment services need to acknowledge the barriers, stigma, normative expectations, etc. that women face, including the high prevalence of violence and other types of abuse, and ensure trauma-informed and gender-sensitive interventions.

Sensitised and Inclusive Services for all
Gender-based tools, research, and programmes often are focused on the traditional gender component and focus on the 'male' and 'female' gender. Even though these programmes are important to be further implemented, researched, developed, and advocated for, it is incredibly important to broaden the target group of various minority communities. Each target group requires individualised programmes to ensure the effectiveness of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation, and support the pathways of recovery. Below a few target populations are highlighted, however, more do exist and require individualised approach and inclusion.

Elderly population
Substance use among the elderly community has long been an under-researched area, even less so among elderly women. Substance use patterns tend to be different among elderly people and younger age groups. The elderly population are less exposed to new drugs and rather follows the drug patterns used in their younger years. Although typically substance use declines after young adulthood, SAMHSA[12] concluded in 2018 that in the United States, nearly 1 million adults aged 65 and older live with substance use. Recent data has demonstrated a concerning trend in certain countries, where the use of substances is increasing at a higher rate among older individuals compared to younger age groups.

Refugee population
Substance use among refugee population is evident, yet treatment is often difficult to access. "Refugees may face cultural, linguistic, or systems barriers to connecting with mainstream substance use treatment programmes, which may be compounded by refugees' unique experiences with exposure to trauma, displacement in refugee camps, and resettlement"[13]. Often, people who are refugees are unable to access culturally and linguistically relevant services. The difficulties created by policy environments to enable an interpreter pose extra barriers to successful treatment or even receiving a referral to treatment by professionals.

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[11] https://wfad.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WFAD-GWG-Treatment-and-Recovery-FINAL.pdf
[12] https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_2792/ShortReport-2792.html
[13] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5575738/

Parenthood
Parents may encounter challenges when seeking treatment for substance use, particularly when it comes to accessing residential centers that often do not accommodate the presence of their children. Simultaneously, the responsibilities of parenting, especially for mothers, can hinder consistent participation in outpatient programs. Moreover, parents may face additional barriers stemming from the fear of potentially losing custody of their children. Therefore, family-centred and strengthening programmes are essential. These programmes must provide tools for rehabilitation, such as vocational training, job opportunities, support in home seeking, and support family reunification, if possible, as these remain an important factor in remaining motivated to sustain recovery.

Young persons
Children and adolescents with substance use dependency face a higher urgency for treatment. As they are in their developmental stage, early detection, intervention and treatment can prevent long-term negative effects. However, young persons facing substance use disorders are often unaware of the procedures to access treatment, face financial barriers and stigma, and do often not have availability to age-appropriate treatment. Hence, social support systems should increase drug awareness, including preventive measures, while providing active support for appropriate treatment when a child faces a substance use disorder. Simultaneously, children whose parents use substances require attention as they face an increased impact which is reflected in the child's development outcomes and in their daily lives[14]. It is crucial to prioritize the needs of children and ensure that they can grow up in a nurturing and safe environment.

Persons with disabilities
Overall, people with disabilities, including physical, learning, and other disabilities, have a higher rate of substance use dependency. They oftentimes face various triggers that may encourage substance use and encounter problems, such as personal adjustment, normalisation, socialisation, and health-related difficulties. However, research is lacking. When focusing on women with disabilities, who are in a position of dependency, it is seen that they face greater risks of partners' and professionals' violence and neglect. Many women with disabilities who struggle with addiction live with abysmal finances and face oppression based on their gender, ability, and substance use. Addiction can become a tool to oppress and execute violence by the partner or professional. In treatment and recovery, it is a prerequisite that the special needs of women with disabilities are met and that their integrity and boundaries are respected. This entails that treatment professionals and other services are well acquainted with the knowledge and tools to offer the best services and do not act on prejudice or preconceptions based on normative ideals of how women with a disability are or should act. The person with a disability should be supported in setting boundaries and building mutual trust.

Women in homelessness
Women living in homelessness face victimisation and co-occurring issues, such as health risk behaviours, mental health problems, and substance use disorders. Addressing risk factors and violence within this key population requires a significant focus on their social context. In treatment, the burden of past traumas, intimate partner violence, mental health, and other health conditions need to be considered to fully understand their substance use disorder. Further evidence-based practices and methods, including co-occurring issues, needs to be established for this key population. Additionally, within trauma work, addressing feelings of shame, emotional distress, and depression should be addressed while preventing re-traumatisation.

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[14] Children whose parents use drugs - Pompidou Group (coe.int)

Simultaneously, additional support should be provided to those living in homelessness, such as housing, reintegration, and support in recovery pathways. Furthermore, awareness programmes reducing stigmatisation will allow the community to understand, help, and support those living without a home, stimulating reintegration. Besides this, the local government and criminal justice responses to women without homes should be reconsidered by policymakers while promoting the human rights, health, and welfare of individuals. Finally, treatment and screening services should become more accessible.

Concluding Remarks

It can be concluded that a gender perspective must be integrated in all aspects of the continuum of care framework, including the prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery pathways. Each aspect within the framework is equally important and will need to be sensitised. Gender-sensitivity programmes need to be further researched, established, and implemented to ensure the availability of effective prevention programmes for all children, reduce barriers to treatment, reduce stigma, and strengthen recovery-oriented system of care.

Transformative Peacebuilding Methods for Institutions, Education Systems and Communities

Burcu Eke Schneider, Peace Worker

The world is currently grappling with a multitude of unprecedented challenges. These challenges encompass various areas, including climate change, the rise of violent and hateful ideologies, the alarming loss of biodiversity, ongoing conflicts and wars, and the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to these challenges, there is a growing prevalence of mental and psychological health issues that naturally arise as a consequence. These collective challenges demand our attention and require concerted efforts to address them effectively.

"Real world issues are highly 'psychologized': contaminated with shared perceptions, thoughts, fantasies, and emotions (both conscious and unconscious) pertaining to past historical glories and traumas (losses, humiliations, mourning difficulties, feelings of entitlement of revenge, and resistance to accepting changed realities)" (Volkan, 1997, 117). Functionally, we are no longer able to talk face-to-face, to communicate at eye level, to "touch" each other. Despite progress in some countries, people with mental health conditions often experience severe human rights violations, discrimination, and stigma…which goes from generation to generation.

To find solutions to these many problems, Nature-Based Dialogue Methods in, and with, nature, can help in healing the heavy burden which is related to our disconnection from nature (Beery et al., 2023). These new methods can then be adapted to the local conflict(s), for a better understanding of people's needs. They are also an important part of the 'New Peacebuilding Process', which means taking alternative actions on social inequality and ecological unsustainability, to create more just and sustainable spaces. In today's world, it is imperative to be able to bring peacebuilding to the many crises that affect our daily lives (Rosales & Davis, 2023) In the process of addressing these challenges, peacebuilding plays a crucial role in preventing violence by fostering inclusiveness and facilitating the development of a shared understanding. There are three primary ways in which peacebuilding contributes to this:

1) It supports an inclusive process of just transition that respects the diversity of cultural backgrounds and ethnicity.

2) It promotes more "environmentally-friendly" and sustainable behaviors and attitudes among participants.

3) It conveys new interpretation of the collective struggle for a common future in different languages, cultures, and sacred places. Here we observe how peacebuilding efforts contribute positively to social innovation and ecological transformation, and through a positive change in the behaviors and actions of the participants (Eke Schneider, 2022).

In implementing this new peacebuilding idea, it is crucial to acknowledge the transformative power of cities and the fact that cities are shared spaces inhabited by people from diverse cultures.

It is widely recognized that nature has a profound impact on our well-being (Jimenez et al., 2021). We also know that Green Spaces can provide mental health benefts and lower the risk

of psychiatric disorders (Engemann et al., 2019). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2021) highlights the need to transform humankind's relationship with nature.

We have witnessed the numerous advantages of having access to parks, green spaces, and community gardens in terms of our mental and physical well-being. These spaces and programs have played a crucial role in connecting diverse communities, encompassing different races, ethnicities, ages, and health statuses, with the wonders of nature (EEA, 2020).

But the part of the problem that has not so far been well-addressed is making the connection of communities **within** communities...to achieve the many other broad-based societal solutions to reduce structural violence. That needs the inclusion of a **Triangle of Actors** to help create a new, and all-important dialogue**:**

- Institutions (including Environmental, Academic, and Art): Institutions can, and should, play a pioneering role…through the sharing of their knowledge with local school teachers…in building a culture of sustainable and just peace in the classroom, in the school, and in the community.

- Peace Educators: They are best trained/suited to evaluate the needs of the community within the community, and can help design sustainable and just programs accordingly. They usually come from diverse backgrounds, and have a strong bond with their roots and their communities.

- Community-based Teachers: Teachers in the local schools can also play an important peacebuilding role ...for the betterment of all communities in their school district and neighbourhoods.

Only through starting to build programs at the local micro level (individuals and neighbourhoods), and continuing at the meso level (regional), we can scale and reach our broader goals on an international macro level.

In support of this article's learnings and recommendations, relevant micro-level case studies/projects are hereby provided:

The Peace Garden[1] **(Wuppertal, Germany, 2020)**
This started as a research project in urban transformation…named the Urban Gardening Peace Project[2]. By creating a dialogue with various actors in the city, the idea was implemented with diverse people from Bosnia, the Czech Republic, Syria, and some local representatives of a marginalized community (especially the youth). All of these communities had experienced war, violence, or the destructive effects of Communism. To heal the traumas passed down from generation to generation, the idea of creating a Peace Garden was born. The goal was to reduce violence in their urban environment, with the help of nature.

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[1] Peace Garden is an Avantgardenist approach. It is a new method which works in nature to build an agroecologicall relationship among plants, humans, and animals, in an experimental, radical, or transformative manner with respect to art, culture and society.

[2] Urban Gardening Peace Project https://sustainablejustcities.eu/multimedia/project-urban-gardening-peace-project-wuppertal

The project's Peace Garden used a "nature-based approach" as a Dialogue Method for a sustainable and just future in an urban context. All actors involved were able to meet at eye level – a prerequisite for any transformation. Over time, the Peace Garden became an educational platform for out-of-school methods. Here, these varied groups exchanged knowledge and learned from each other through intercultural and interreligious dialogue…all while growing organic vegetables, fruit, and herbs, and learning about local biodiversity, strengthening the visibility of women and changing consumption behaviours.

After starting this local peacebuilding and education process, not only did the local environment and urban sociology, psychology, architecture, behaviours, and attitudes change… new transformative ideas were also born. Beyond planting herb beds and growing vegetables in the middle of the city, the Peace Garden aimed to improve the levels of mutual respect in relationships, while taking responsibility for a good life for future generations (Eke Schneider, 2022). While the process started with peace science on a micro (individual) level, it led to new ideas and scientific solutions for urban transformation. The 'key learning' from this exercise- the strongest force behind any transformation…was an individual-level force (such as the desire to have a societal impact, develop solutions, or do something valuable and meaningful) (Kump et al., 2023) Additionally, after documentation of the value of this creative and solution-oriented approach, the study became an empirical example for the scientific community in transformation of cities and communities. It has inspired many other actors to use nature for intercultural and interreligious dialogue between parties.

This small initiative in Wuppertal, has now catalyzed a new transformative idea in all of Germany. A Policy Brief Proposal (published during Germany's G7 Presidency in 2022) for achieving sustainable and just cities through building bridges between Institutions, Education Systems, and Communities via a micro-level peacebuilding process, is the first evidence-based solution presented to policy-makers and decision-makers. Also, this year, Germany's Service for Peace Education team introduced the first Model School for Peace Education in the country. The intent is to address a shortcoming in the educational system, now adding a new focus on response competencies to climate change, nature-human connectivity, gender-based problems, and other crisis situations[3].

UNESCO "Exploring Nature-Based Sustainable Livelihoods Through Community Dialogues" (East Rennell, Solomon Islands, 2022)

This regional program started with an invitation to each local community to carry out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Here they identified existing challenges and opportunities, bringing together key stakeholders (including community representatives, ministries, governments, NGO partners, and other experts) to find ways to move forward on the development of nature-based, sustainable livelihoods. The dialogue sessions covered: identification of challenges and opportunities; sharing of experiences and "lessons learned" from other projects; and the drafting an action plan. While

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[3] In 16. February 2022, an Online-Workshop: "Sustainability and Interreligious Dialogue" has been held in Wuppertal. The workshop explored what potentials religion, spirituality and nature offer in the current transformation of living environments in our cities. In particular, the potentials of dialogue with and between religious centres for a sustainable future was looked at. The focus was on three aspects that are particularly important for the upcoming urban changes: The interaction of different communities in relation to a sustainable future; the issues of mobility; and those of nature-based, culturally sensitive solutions on the ground. The workshop addressed these aspects in several thematically-oriented groups. Representatives from different religious communities as well as the young generation, presented ideas to promote inclusive change and building resilient communities. At the beginning, the award-winning director Nuran David Çalış gave a speech on the topics of transnational identity, spirituality, and the contribution of art to a more just and sustainable future.

the Final Plan has not yet published, this regional bridge-building approach is a good example of how to build trust between all regional parties in taking responsibility for their common future.

"Schools4Future": Nature-Based Urban Transformation through Architecture and Design (Wuppertal, Germany, 2020)

This project was led by the Wuppertal Institute and Quadrat, and funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. Since the start of the project in 2020, students from twelve schools throughout Germany have calculated their carbon footprint, developed measures to reduce emissions, and implemented climate protection measures, at their schools. Germany has set the goal of being climate neutral by 2045 at the latest[4].

Nelson Mandela's words resonate with truth when he emphasized the power of education as a transformative force in the world. However, to tackle the multifaceted challenges of our time, another powerful tool must be harnessed: nature. Fortunately, nature is readily available and accessible to us, offering immense potential. By combining the forces of education and nature, we can unlock innovative scientific approaches to effectively address the pressing needs of our transforming world.

This approach has already been put into practice, in the Peace Garden (Wuppertal) case study outlined above. And based on the Peace Gardens' study results, we can conclude that the process gave the local participants autonomy, supported personal growth, inspired transformative thinking in a variety of channels, opened spaces in decision-making for women, and created consciousness for a good and just life for all. It was evident during this project, that this was a transformative process for all participants. However, one must not forget that this process needs translation between parties. In this way, transformative peace science can contribute its tools and methods, with dialogue adapted to the local language.

Nature-Based Dialogue Methods do have the capacity to activate the new peacebuilding process. Which, in turn, has the ability to address many of the problems within our communities. We have experimented with this idea in a real-world laboratory, and now its time to go beyond borders.

In summary, this article argues that the creation of informed dialogue between the aforementioned Triangle of Actors (Institutions, Peace Educators, Teachers/Schools), is a roadmap for transformative and intersectional solutions to the myriad of the local Communities', and the World's, problems. As such, it calls for a profound re-direction in the activity of these actors, to successfully affect the outside environment. It is imperative that all actors begin this change…now.

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Terri Renella is on a mission and passionate about showing how the lack of self-love, worthiness, and the connection is causing negative thoughts and emotions in individuals leading to an increase in chronic diseases, depression, and much more. With over 30 years as a high-performance sales leader and Personal Development Coach working for and with large corporations which include IBM, Microsoft, Intel, Avaya Communications, and Chevron, Terri developed a rare cancer that came back three times and almost took her life, all from stress. She is now a three-time cancer thriver, Radical Remission, Motivational Speaker, and Author. She started https://terrisflowers.com/ as a way to show the power of connecting with a random stranger. Social integration is a huge predictor of longevity and since surviving cancer, she has handed out over 300 flower bouquets to random strangers and has some incredible stories of connection and love. She has now been cancer free for seven years. Since becoming cancer-free, Terri works with individuals and teams to assist them with understanding where stress is

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Karen Wagnon is a wife, mother, stepmother to 7, and proud Nina to 10 grandchildren. As a Certified Human Behavior Consultant and Master Trainer through the Insights Institute in Atlanta, GA, Karen has dedicated her career to empowering and equipping educators and parents with the tools they need to build positive relationships with the children in their lives. She founded Teaching Our Youth, a staff and professional development group, in 2004, with a mission to improve communication, increase productivity, and reduce stress and conflict in our relationships. Her first book, "My Three and Me, A Journey in Parenting by Design", is a must-read for any parent or educator looking to improve their understanding of the four personality types in the DISC Model of Human Behavior. As a transformational parent coach, she works with parents of tweens and teens to help them maintain a positive relationship, even when their children push them away. Her unique parenting program, The Parenting Blueprint™, A Plan to Parent by Design, takes parents on a journey to transform their parenting style from chaos to confidence. Using personality understanding as the foundation, this self-paced course includes parent coaching to ensure a successful transformation.

If you are an educational leader or parent coach looking to improve your communication skills, build positive relationships, and transform your parenting style, Karen Wagnon is the expert you need. Her passion for helping parents & educators build stronger relationships with children makes her a valuable resource for you to make a positive impact in the lives of young people.

To learn more about how to Parent by Design, click here to develop your Parenting Blueprint™ https://www.teachingouryouth.com/the-parenting-blueprint-overview. Click here if you would like to learn more about becoming a Parenting Blueprint™ Coach. https://www.teachingouryouth.com/become-parenting-blueprint-coach
Contact Karen Wagnon: Karen@teachingouryouth.com
www.teachingouryouth.com

An educator of almost 20 years, **Dr. Stevens** has worked in high-needs schools passionately working to improve the learning experiences of students in multiple states. She has influenced school transformation in ways ranging from improving student growth and proficiency to improving advanced academics with College Board recognition. While working as a principal, Dr. Stevens realized her talents could be expanded into multiple schools, reaching several campus administrators and teachers. So, she began engaging more and more on an individual level with districts composed of schools in need of improvement. If you ask her to share her intent, she will say, "If we are to protect the next generation and position them to be able to make decisions, we (educators) HAVE to be masters of our craft." Dr. Stevens is committed to providing solutions to high-needs schools, while ensuring the students served can have access to options through education, despite their current circumstances.

Laurin Mayeno is a consultant and coach focusing on racial and gender equity, based in California, USA. She is also the parent of a queer nonbinary adult child and author of the bilingual children's book One of a Kind, Like Me/Unico como yo.

Munir Moosa is a self-determined learning practitioner and socio-educational theorist. He has been working as an Assistant Professor of Education at SMI University, Pakistan for the last eleven years. He also holds the role of founding volunteer director at the Global Forum for Teacher Educators, where he offers complementary human rights education to marginalized communities, particularly children, women, and the elderly. Through this work, he has developed a series of socio-eco-ethical models with global application in human rights education, social work, and inclusivity.

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Marte Skaara is co-founder and Creative Director of Climate Creativity (https://climate-creativity.com/) where she works with climate change and sustainability in education and communication. In her work, she seeks to foster creativity, resilience and hope through storytelling and art. Marte is also a farmer and activist who cares deeply about our connection to the land, the ocean and each other – devoted to learning the language of place, becoming world.

John Row has been storytelling for over thirty years and has written and performed his poetry for over fifty. He has visited schools on five continents and performs regularly at major festivals in the U.K. He was the first Storyteller in Residence in a British prison and since then has run projects in about thirty prisons and young offender institutions. Since the beginning of the pandemic, he has curated the online storytelling site, worldstorytellingcafe.com and is the artistic director of the Marrakech International Storytelling Festival. Currently, he is involved in projects in Morocco, Roumania, and the U.K.
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World Federation Against Drugs (WFAD) is a multilateral community of non-governmental organisations and individuals. Founded in 2009, the aims of WFAD is to strengthen prevention, increase access to treatment and to promote recovery. The members of WFAD share a common concern that illicit drug use is threatening the existence of stable families, communities, and government institutions throughout the world. The work of WFAD is built on the principles of universal fellowship and basic human and democratic rights. We believe that working toward the goal of a drug-free world will promote peace, human development, democracy, tolerance, equality, freedom and justice.

Burcu Eke Schneider is a peace worker from Ankara, Turkey, with a background in journalism and peace and conflict studies. Burcu created the "Urban Gardening Peace Project" in Wuppertal, a nature-based micro-level peacebuilding project which received attention in both the media and research. She transforms peace science into a real-world environment and finds state-of-the-art scientific solutions. She was selected as a young scientist of the Right Livelihood Campus Bonn. She was selected T7 Social cohesion, economic transformation, and open societies task force during the Germany's presidency and is UNRISD Eco-social contract, Istanbul Development Agency Climate adaptation and climate justice working group member. She cares deeply about a shared understanding of mutual respect. Above all, it is also important for her to take responsibility for future generations.