

RETHINKING SCHOOL CRISIS PLANS IN PRINCIPAL PREPARATION

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The method of *currere* has opened an avenue for curriculum theorizing that I was not familiar with until a colleague introduced me to this fascinating and relevant approach (Pinar, 1975, 1994, 2012). Before I started this venture with *currere*, I had to consider the intent and purpose of this article. As Pinar (2012) states, a scholar should ask the question, “What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?” (p. 1). I have spent time engaging in the four steps of *currere*—regressive, progressive, analytic, and synthetic—and this has helped me reconstruct my experiences as a 7th-grade student, building principal, and current professor in a new light. This process has given new meaning to my experiences that I can integrate into my present role as a professor serving and preparing future school leaders.

ENCOUNTERING THE PAST

I recalled learning experiences that stemmed from my first encounter with death by suicide. In 1984, I was 12 years of age and transitioning to the 7th grade at a junior high school located 40 miles west of Chicago. I have a contrarian viewpoint when I reflect on my childhood experiences. You see, my family and I experienced a tragic loss the night before I started the 7th-grade. I could never have predicted how this tragedy would impact my leadership capacity as a middle school principal years later.

The night before my 7th grade school year began, my father’s best friend, Paul,¹ committed suicide. Paul was a funny, energetic, and giving man with a son, Jackson, a wife-Trisha, and a dog named Max. Paul’s family and my family spent many summer weekends together at little league baseball games, birthday, and swimming parties at Paul’s house, as well as Friday night dinners at the local Sizzlers’ restaurant. Unfortunately, Paul and Trisha had legally separated, and later I found out that he had become severely depressed. Researchers have stated that divorce among males is a risk factor for suicide (Sullivan, 2019). The memory of the night that Paul passed stirs great sadness, and my 7th-grade school experience will forever be remembered as the night I was introduced to death by suicide.

The night that Paul died, I remember a knock at our front door at approximately 10:00 p.m. My parents were already in bed, as my mother had to wake up for work at 3:00 a.m. My father was typically up by 5:00 a.m. to make it to his place of employment for his 6:30 a.m. shift on the assembly line. It was a typical August night in Illinois, which commonly meant hot days followed by cooler evenings. All the bedroom windows were open, with pedestal fans running throughout the house and in bedrooms to keep everyone cool. I remember lying in bed that evening close to the fan in my room when suddenly I heard knocking at our front door. I remember thinking to myself: Who would be knocking on our front door at 10 p.m. on a Sunday? I could hear my father whisper to my mother in their adjacent room. He got out of bed, walked to the front door, turned on the exterior front door light, peeked out the window, and said, “Oh, that’s Paul’s younger brother, Mark.” My father opened the door and said, “Hey, Mark, you alright?” I could not see Mark as I stayed in my bed trying to listen to the faint conversation between Mark and my father. I heard Mark say something using the words “dead,” “suicide,”

“afternoon.” It was difficult to hear the conversation, but I immediately knew something was wrong. My father told Mark, “Thanks for letting me know, and I’m sorry, Mark.”

My father closed the door, turned off the front light, and walked back to the bedroom where my mother was lying awake in bed. My father closed the bedroom door, and I heard him say, “Paul killed himself this afternoon. He hung himself in his garage.” At that moment, I recalled the most awful, shrieking sound of sadness that I had ever heard. My mother frantically yelled, “No! Please, God, please not Paul, please Tony, tell me this is not true! Oh my God, God please, please, no!!!” I remember hearing my mother and father whispering to one another throughout the night, but due to the circulating fans, closed bedroom doors, and my anxiousness the night before school, I could not hear what was being said between them. I recall wondering, while lying in bed and trying to process this current tragic event, if my sisters and I would even attend the first day of school. As I was experiencing all the emotions ranging from anxiousness to sadness, I eventually dozed off and went to sleep. I woke up the next morning to the sound of a very loud alarm clock. I immediately turned off the alarm and sat in my bed. I remember asking myself, Was this a bad dream? Did Paul kill himself? Am I going to school today? When I got up from my bed and opened the door, I remember hearing someone in the kitchen. I was not sure if it was my father, mother, or sisters. My sisters attended elementary school, and my oldest sister, Bea, was beginning 5th grade. My youngest sister, Robin, was beginning 3rd grade. Their school day began at 8:00 a.m., and since the elementary school was only two blocks from our house, both of my sisters walked to school together. My school day did not begin until 9:00 a.m., so I would leave the house after my sisters.

When I walked into the kitchen, my sisters were sitting at the kitchen counter eating bowls of cereal with their hair brushed and wearing new school clothes, which was a rite of passage for all three of us. We loved school clothes shopping as it was one of the few occasions when we would wear our best clothes to school. When I peeked into the kitchen, Bea and Robin looked at me and laughed (which was normal). Bea said, “What’s wrong with you?”

I did not respond right away because I remembered thinking, Maybe I had a bad dream? Bea just gave me a look when I did not respond. I snapped out of my daze and responded to her second question with, “Where are Mom and Dad?”

Then, both of my sisters looked at me and laughed. Robin, the youngest, said, “Brett, they are at work, remember, and today is the first day of school. We are leaving in 15 minutes so that we can play on the playground before the first bell.”

I looked at both of my sisters and asked, “Did you guys hear anything last night? Didn’t someone knock on the front door, and Dad was talking to someone?”

Both of my sisters gave me a puzzled look and said, “What’s wrong with you?”

Both got up from the barstool seats at the kitchen counter and poured the milk from their cereal in the kitchen sink and went back to their room to finish getting ready.

As Bea cleaned out her cereal bowl, she said, “Brett, dad left you a note and wants you to call him at work before you leave for school.”

I responded, “Okay, I will.”

My sisters finished getting ready and walked to school. I decided to have a bowl of Cookie Crisp in front of the television, since I was home alone and had the TV to myself. After eating my cereal, I decided to get dressed for school; then, I would call my father. I remember thinking that I had dreamt that Paul had died. I had assumed that my parents would not go to work if someone close to our family had committed suicide, and the same for us regarding school. So, I had figured the night before that we would all stay

home, and my parents would inform Bea, Robin, and I that Paul had died. However, this was not the case. After getting dressed, I returned to the kitchen and called my father. I was completely confused.

When I called my dad's work, he answered the phone. "This is Tony, may I help you?"

During this time, caller ID and cell phones did not exist, at least within the mainstream.

I responded, "Dad, it's Brett, and your note said to call you." My father responded, "Brett, did you hear anything last night?" I replied, "Yeah, but I thought it was a bad dream."

My dad said, "Well, Brett, I am sorry, and I thought your mom, or I should stay back this morning just in case you or the girls heard something, but you know we really cannot miss work as we need the money. So, you heard Paul passed away then? He took his own life, and your mom and I are heartbroken. Are you okay?"

I answered, "I am okay, but why did Paul do that? Does Jackson know?"

My dad started, "I am not sure, Brett. It is hard, but we will all talk about it tonight.

I do not think Bea and Robin know, so do not say anything, and we will talk tonight. I need you to go to school and focus on your education today. It is your first day of 7th grade, and it is important for you to be there. I hate to say it, but death is a part of life, and we cannot change what Paul did to himself, so we all must move forward. We will talk tonight. Make sure you lock the side door when you leave and be strong today, and again, focus on school. I will talk to you later. Bye."

I said, "Bye," hung up the phone, put my lunch in my bookbag, and walked to school. As a child, I was not completely sure how I should feel, respond, or even act. My parents were ill-prepared to provide me or my younger sisters with a roadmap on how we should process or grieve the death of a close family member. I remember saying to myself, Be strong, Brett and things will be okay. Since I was uncertain and inexperienced with understanding mortality and death, coupled with my father's apathetic reaction to losing his friend, I did as my father instructed and went to school.

FACING THE PRESENT

During the Fall of 2019 as a first-year professor, my first semester instructing the Principalship Course, I became fully conscious of how my personal and professional experiences as a student and school leader have provided me with knowledge that I can incorporate into my syllabus that will support my graduate students when they are practicing educational leaders (Pinar, 2004). One assignment that I require my students to complete in the Principalship Course is to conduct a gap analysis between two building crisis plans. The rationale behind this assignment is to provide future school leaders with an opportunity to critically examine their building crisis plan from a building principal's perspective and make recommendations for improvement. The Crisis Plan assignment is a culminating activity for principal candidates to conclude what they have learned about school crisis policy and safety plans and requirements per state mandates (Ohio Department of Education, 2022). The one aspect of the Crisis Plan assignment that I attempt to examine in-depth with students pertains to student death, specifically death by suicide.

Many times, school districts will provide professional development for building leaders before students and teachers return from summer break. During these professional development opportunities for administrators, district leadership will provide an overview of crisis plan state requirements. For instance, Ohio State Law (Requirements for the Emergency Management Plan and Test, 2017) requires school districts to create

and implement an “Emergency Management Plan.” A school buildings’ emergency management or crisis plan is typically left for the building principal to review, revise, submit to the state, and conduct trainings accompanied by emergency drills throughout the school year for students and staff. Furthermore, building principals are not only expected to lead every aspect of the emergency management or crisis plan, but they are also supposed to have expertise in addressing crisis situations that take place before, during, and after the school day. In response to state requirements for principals with crisis plans, colleges and universities have attempted to integrate aspects of crisis planning leadership into existing leadership courses. In addition, education departments across the United States have provided tools and roadmaps for building principals to use in their buildings. However, the tools and crisis planning roadmaps typically do not provide school leaders with resources that support their own social-emotional needs. Specifically, a roadmap for school principals to implement when one of their own students or staff passes due to suicide. For example, the state of Ohio School Safety Center provides a roadmap on staff training, suicide prevention, suicide hotline numbers, and postvention (Ohio School Safety Center, n.d.) but does not provide any resources or tools that will support the social emotional needs of the building leader.

During my graduate studies, I did not benefit from learning strategies that would support my efforts to lead a building during a student suicide. There was no roadmap and limited guidance was provided by my parents. The tragic situation was simply transactional, and I learned to frame death and loss as part of life. However, my personal life experience with death by suicide has provided insight into leading a school community during a crisis. Bolman and Deal (2017) state that “crises are an acid test of leadership. In the heat of the moment, leaders sometimes hesitate until events pass them by” (p. 297). When a student passes away, whether by suicide, car accident, or disease, school principals must have the capacity and ability to remain calm and focus on what they can control (Prothero, 2021); school leadership courses at the graduate level must create educational systems that will incorporate and prepare future leaders to lead during times of crisis. School leaders are expected to lead by example during a crisis, but school districts and university principal preparation programs have not provided adequate training throughout the years. The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) in 2018 created an *After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools* resource guide for school administrators to use if a school community experiences death by suicide. However, the one component that is not reviewed in this resource guide is a social-emotional roadmap for the self-care of principals.

During my second year as a middle school principal and my 18th year as an urban school administrator, I encountered losing a student to death by suicide. In the Spring of 2017, our district had a School Improvement Day, which is essentially when teachers and administration conduct professional development sessions driven by the school’s improvement plan. The School Improvement Day is a non-attendance day for students, and they are all required to be off school grounds and at home. This particular School Improvement Day is a time that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I have made concerted efforts to apply what I have learned from this tragic experience and weave this knowledge into the Principalship Course I teach in Educational Administration (Pinar, 1975).

Maria was a 6th-grade student in my school who took her own life on that spring School Improvement Day in 2017. I remember receiving a phone call that night at 9:15 p.m. from our school resource officer. Officer Still informed me that Maria Perez took her own life by hanging herself from a ceiling fan in her grandmother’s bedroom at

approximately 1:00 p.m. Her grandmother was responsible for supervising Maria and her 1st-grade brother while both of her parents worked factory jobs at a local warehouse. Maria's family emigrated from Mexico to the United States when she was in second grade. Her parents worked many hours, and it was quite common for Maria and her brother to be in the care of Maria's grandmother, or Abuela.

When Officer Still informed me of this tragedy, I was shocked and speechless. As I was listening, I tried to recollect what Maria looked like in my mind. My school had over 750 students, and about 275 were sixth-grade students. After Officer Still's phone call, I immediately opened my laptop to identify Maria, identify the teachers she had on her 8-period schedule, and look for guidance on action steps in my school crisis plan. I located Maria's picture in our student information system, which contained her demographic information, phone numbers, address, parents' names, emergency contacts, etc. I recognized Maria but did not know her well. She was incredibly quiet, small, and unassuming, like many sixth-grade students in a large middle school. Just as I did as a 7th grade student, my default mechanism was a transactional mindset. I focused on tasks to avoid the vulnerable emotions I felt during both tragic experiences. I decided to call my school's social worker, Ms. Braddock, to notify her that one of our 6th-grade students passed away and see if she had any interactions with Maria that school year. Ms. Braddock stated that Maria never visited her office, nor did she have peer mediation or complaints about Maria. Ms. Braddock informed me that she would be at school by 7:00 a.m. Monday to support students and teachers. I thanked Ms. Braddock and informed her of the action steps I would take starting that night and over the weekend.

Next, I printed out Maria's schedule from my home printer and secured the names of her teachers. Before I contacted the teachers, I created an email notifying our school community that one of our sixth-grade students had unexpectedly passed away during the day. I shared her name and information. In addition, I informed the staff that we would have a staff meeting as a school faculty in the technology center on Monday at 8:00 a.m. Then I drafted an email to my staff. In the email I informed staff that our school and district crisis team (made up of counselors and social workers from my school and other schools in the same district) would be available in the multipurpose room starting at 8:00 a.m. on Monday. Next, I shared with staff that we would review our crisis plan protocol and procedures for student support during the Monday faculty meeting. Finally, I closed the email by asking all to please keep the Perez family in their thoughts and prayers. Although I had a draft of the email in my queue, I would not send it until I contacted Maria's teachers by phone.

I started contacting Maria's teachers one by one. Unfortunately, my building's crisis plan did not have a script of what to say and how to convey such a message to teachers, so I simply shared the information that Officer Still had given me. As one can imagine, Maria's teachers were shocked and heartbroken by the news. After I contacted every teacher, I sent the email to the rest of the staff at the middle school. Once the appropriate communication plan was completed, I realized that I needed to go to school on Saturday morning and collect Maria's items from her locker and classrooms.

After a sleepless night thinking about Maria, I got up around 6:15 a.m., took a shower, and headed to my middle school. After deactivating the school alarm, I walked to my office to locate the student locker book to find Maria's locker number and combination. I remember walking through the quiet and dark hallways alone, sad, and mentally exhausted, thinking about why a 12-year-old child would take their own life. When I arrived at Maria's locker, I kept asking myself, Why? What did we miss? Was it bullying? Was she depressed? Did something happen at home that our school was not informed about? As I asked these questions to myself, I followed the locker combination

steps: place the dial on the number zero, turn the first number two times around the zero, turn the dial counterclockwise to the second number, and then turn clockwise to the third number. Finally, the lock popped, and I lifted on the handle and opened the locker door, all the time wanting to cry, run out of the building, and resign from my principal position. However, I could hear my father's voice, "death is a part of life." I leaned again on the transactional crutch of moving forward and denying my own feelings of hurt and guilt.

Maria's locker was what I imagined it would be for a 6th-grade student. She had a few pictures taped to the inside door that included a picture of a small dog, her baby brother, parents, and a picture of her and a handful of friends that had been taken at a local park. I vividly remember how Maria and her friends seemed happy, carefree, and enjoying a beautiful fall day at the playground in that picture. I began to examine all the contents in her locker. First, I opened a few of Maria's textbooks to see if there were any written letters or notes that would provide me with some indication as to why she took her own life. As I placed Maria's textbooks into an unused book bag, I kept thinking, How is this possible? As a school leader and student, I have made a concerted effort to learn from demanding situations, specifically tragedies. I had said to my 7th-grade self before the first day of school, Brett, be strong, and things will be okay, but now I knew things would not be "okay" for quite some time, if ever. However, as the building principal, I had to be okay. I had to lead our school community out of the darkness of this tragedy by being "okay" and staying strong. I would have to grieve later; I needed to place my emotions aside and support the stakeholders of my school.

I continued to look for any clues or hints that I would find about why Maria took her own life and suddenly came across a purple spiral notebook. I opened the notebook and made sure that Maria's name was in it, which it was. I continued to flip through the spiral notebook. I came across a handwritten letter that was from Maria. I had found her "goodbye letter." There was no date on the letter, and it was not addressed to anyone, but it was devastating. My first inclination was that Maria committed suicide due to bullying or harassment that had taken place, and it had gone unnoticed. However, the letter Maria wrote was in some ways worse from my perspective. In her letter, Maria explained that her life was not worth living. She noted that no one cared about her, and if she disappeared, no one at home or school would even notice. Maria stated that she had few friends and that her parents always worked and did not have the resources to provide her with a cell phone, iPad, or laptop, which were all things she wanted to possess for her to fit into her peer group. In that one-page letter, Maria's last statement was, "Good-bye world, and it was nice knowing you." I tucked the spiral notebook under my arm and examined the other folders and notebooks, placing them in the unused book bag with the other items. Maria's letter, as one could imagine, broke me into pieces. As a father of a 10-year-old daughter and school principal who had just lost a student to suicide, I was broken. I knew that it was not the time to process my own emotional needs and that I had to keep moving forward. The school community depends on the principal to lead during a crisis.

I contacted Officer Still and notified him that I found a letter of interest that may provide insight into Maria's death. Next, I sent an email to my superintendent and Director of Student Services explaining how I cleaned out Maria's locker and discovered a letter of interest that would be turned over to Officer Still. I placed Maria's letter in a locked cabinet in my office until Officer Still could take it into his possession. After securing the letter and Maria's belongings, I transitioned to the needs of students and teachers who would need social-emotional support on Monday. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) claim that, when a school faces the death of a student, "members of a school community

will often rally together” (p. 143) and develop a closer bond and relationship. I knew our building crisis team and teachers would rally on Monday and support our students when they returned. Mentally, I had to prepare myself to conduct a faculty meeting on Monday at 8:00 a.m. and share general information about Maria’s passing and the course of action we would take to support our students and each other. Again, I heard my 7th-grade voice in my head, Stay strong, and things will be okay. I was not okay. I thought my life experiences should have prepared me to lead my school community through this time, but I felt completely inept and vulnerable as a school leader, just like my parents who had lacked the knowledge and resources to support me in processing Paul’s death by suicide when I was in 7th grade.

On the Monday following Maria’s passing, our crisis team members arrived and assembled at 7:00 a.m., which was 1.5 hours before students would arrive. We checked in on one another and immediately focused on preparing for student arrival at 8:30 a.m. Also, I had to mentally prepare myself to lead a faculty meeting where I had to communicate information about Maria’s passing and our action plan to support students and building faculty this week.

In our school’s conference room, I referred to our building crisis plan, which had a section for the “death of a school community member” and action steps that should be taken to provide community support. The crisis plan’s action steps stated that the principal and administration team should collaborate with social workers and counselors and create student stations in a large venue with private barriers, tables, chairs, tissues, water, snacks, paper, pencils, and crayons when students return to school. As a collaborative team, we prepared to greet and comfort students and staff. At 7:50 a.m. I made an announcement on the intercom for all faculty to report to the technology center for the 8:00 a.m. faculty meeting.

I had a total of 73 staff members at my school—73 grief-stricken faces of teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, etc., entered the room. Once everyone arrived and was settled, I stated, “Good morning, and thank you for coming.” Next, I informed the staff that we had a tragic passing of one of our 6th-grade students on Friday due to death by suicide. We paused for a moment of silence in honor of Maria. After the sorrowful moment of silence, I informed the staff that, if they needed support, we had counselors available for them and substitute coverage would be provided. Then, I transitioned my focus to student support. I informed the faculty that at 9:00 a.m. I would announce over the intercom to students informing them that our school lost one of our own and counseling support would be available in the multipurpose room. I asked teachers to be visible in the hallways and to gently escort any student who appeared to the multipurpose room for social work support. After the meeting, I kindly thanked teachers for attending and supporting one another during this tragic experience. My faculty and I eventually supported our school community, specifically students. We provided support to Maria’s family as well. Our teachers, counselors, social workers, and building leadership navigated Maria’s services with our presence at the wake and funeral. Even though I was broken inside, my capacity to lead and support my school community during a crisis was fulfilled to the best of my ability. Perhaps this was solely because I focused on accomplishing tasks and denying my own sense of loss and self. I realized that this might not be my last encounter with death and tragedy within a school community.

Now

During this *currere* process, I have learned from my past and present traumatic experiences as a student and principal, which have influenced my teaching and

instruction in educational leadership. I have realized that traumatic personal and professional experiences have overlapped in my lifetime. When I reflect on my past experiences with death by suicide as a junior high student and school leader, I realize that there are crisis situations that will disrupt the normal routine of school and cause me to question my knowledge and leadership capacity. In many ways, I felt that I had failed Maria, her family, as well as my school community. When Paul passed, I did not understand the magnitude of the situation and how it impacted my family, as we did not discuss it. When Maria passed, as an experienced school leader, I felt ill-prepared socially and emotionally to compassionately lead my school community. My leadership was transactional; I focused on action steps that needed to be addressed—cleaning out lockers, setting up the gymnasium facility for counseling sessions, communicating with staff and the district office. However, I was ill equipped emotionally to address my own emotional state as I had learned to suppress my own emotions as a 7th grade student. When Maria passed, I had regressed to that 7th grade student who went to school with little emotion, focusing on the completion of tasks, the day after a close family friend expired.

I learned from both experiences that school leaders must be progressive when a crisis occurs. I was by no means an expert leader in death by suicide as a 7th grade student or as a principal, which is why I focused on process. By focusing on the process and transactional tasks that needed to be completed, I did not have to tend to my own social-emotional state. In reflecting on those experiences, I have concluded that leaders should implement supportive and participative leadership strategies in times of crisis such as these. Supportive leadership is defined as showing concern for your community during stressful situations (House & Mitchell, 1974). Participative leadership is defined as collaborating with stakeholders and listening to staff who are experts in specific areas (House & Mitchell, 1974). As I prepare my graduate students in the Principalship Course, I aim to provide students with a repertoire of leadership style tools and a crisis plan framework that may support them with the potential tragedies they will encounter as leaders. I share with principal preparation students what I learned through my experiences of leading through a crisis, as well as the importance of not focusing on the transactional steps leaders will take during such events and striving to become a transformational leader for the school community. Transformational leaders are collaborative in nature and encourage stakeholders to provide feedback to support members of the school community (Bernard & Stogdill, 1990). These are the leadership skills principals need to utilize when a school crisis takes place.

Once the principal preparation students are introduced to transformational leadership and have a foundational understanding, I provide crisis scenario case studies for the class to process and use to integrate transformational leadership strategies. We collaboratively process the case study action steps that leaders may consider and discuss them in teams before transitioning to the entire class. The reality of school leaders today is that principal prep students must be provided strategies in their principal preparation graduate studies that will support them when they encounter challenges such as COVID-19, contentious school board meetings, school shootings, etc. The Ohio School Safety Center provides a framework for suicide prevention as well as resources, but I am not certain if this information is sufficient to prepare future school leaders to address the high volume of students who need social-emotional support.

Currently, school principals are leading communities where “35 percent of U.S. parents with school aged-children are concerned or extremely concerned about their child’s mental health” (Dorn et al., 2021, p. 7). Perhaps, now is the time for higher education institutions to reimagine and expand coursework in principal preparation

programs to include courses such as “Crisis Intervention in Schools” and “School Culture,” two courses required by Xavier University’s School Counseling Master of Arts program (Xavier University, n.d.). As higher education professors in educational leadership, we must continue to seek and disseminate strategies that will support our future leaders in navigating the volume of challenges they will encounter in their roles as school leaders.

EPILOGUE

I began teaching the Principalship Course at my university in 2019. Before my transition as a full-time assistant professor, I served in public education for 25 years. I spent 20 of those years in school leadership. I served as an elementary and middle school principal, high school assistant principal, and athletic director in a diverse, suburban community. Although I have been fortunate to serve as an educational leader at multiple levels, as a current assistant professor, I consistently pursue a curriculum that I can use in my school leadership courses to prepare future educational leaders. Specifically, I pursue a leadership curriculum that will prepare future school principals to lead school community members during times of crisis. I have never viewed my 20 plus years of experience as an educational leader as a potential curriculum or curriculum theory until recently.

As I explored and reflected on my *currere* journey, I realized that both of my experiences with death by suicide changed my perceptions of life. I learned through both tragedies that I must never take any person or individual for granted, and each of us, regardless of our career position, gender, racial background, socioeconomic status, etc. have hardships and trauma. We do not have a choice in this matter. However, as an educational administration professor, I have made a choice to instruct my graduate students with compassion, empathy, and grace. I model these characteristics for university students, but more importantly, we dialogue and discuss how effective school leadership is unsustainable without creating and fostering positive relationships with educational stakeholders. I believe that school leaders who exhibit and utilize compassion, empathy, and grace will foster a school culture that is based on trust, respect, and love. During times of crisis these are the transformational qualities our students and teachers need and deserve.

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Endnotes

¹All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of the actual individuals in this article.